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CHAPTER III. Chronology of the collected material and spatial distribution by periods

III.1.1 Introduction

Before we begin with the discussion of the distribution of surface finds by periods, it is important to look at the immediate survey results. In Appendix I we presented the total quantity of surface finds in terms of individual fragments and weight and discussed their spatial distribution at several levels. The overall distribution of finds and particularly their distribution on sector and site levels are analyzed in a greater detail. This analysis reveals a very focal and discontinuous distribution pattern on every level, often with very sharp differences between the zones of various artifact densities. A particular attention is given to the various post-depositional processes and events that affected the surface record and within the same context, to the relation between the local physical environment and the overlying carpet of surface finds. The prominently focal character of the distribution of surface material, but also the fragmented character of the surveyed terrain, seemingly allows the definition of discrete site and off-site zones. In some cases, it is likewise possible to define separate zones of artifact density within the limits of a site or observe the transition between the site and the off-site. But the careful reader will quickly realize that these “sites” are but greater concentrations or clusters of surface finds. In Appendix I they are primarily seen and analyzed as quantitative and physical phenomena, rather than as the remains of past human installations in the landscape. The main goal of this discussion is to provide the sympathetic reader with an account of the fieldwork, of how much of the denser artifact concentrations were covered by the regular grid survey and of the physical conditions potentially shaping the surface archaeological record.

The total archaeological surface record was naturally formed over a long period of time, often accumulated in discontinuous intervals and with variable intensity¹⁰³. It is most conveniently envisioned as consisting of many layers, each representing a separate archaeological epoch. But in reality, the total surface record of an area is an agglomerate of the remains of all periods of local human occupation. It is a palimpsest obscuring both chronological and functional interpretation¹⁰⁴. In this respect the estimated areas of these clusters of finds and their artifact densities tell us little about the actual size and intensity of human settlement in various periods of the past. Before the collected material is chronologically sorted, it can simply point to certain locations in the landscape which humans in general chose to inhabit or exploit more intensely regardless of the particular time-period.

The principle aim of this chapter is to distinguish the input of every period of human occupation in the surface record of the survey area. This should ultimately explain the formation of the clusters of surface finds described in Appendix I. More importantly it will permit us to observe the distribution of surface finds by broader chronological periods and shed light on the history of human habitation over the long term. In order to synthesize these newly acquired data with earlier observations on the physical environment and the location of sites, frequent references will be made to the discussions in chapter II and in Appendix I. Once the material is chronologically sorted, for some periods it becomes difficult to retain the concepts of site and

¹⁰³ M. Kuna, Method of surface artifact survey, 77-83, ed. E. Neustupný, *Space in Prehistoric Bohemia*, Prague 1998.

¹⁰⁴ T. Whitelaw, Reconstructing a Classical Landscape with Figures: some interpretative explorations in NW Keos, 227-243, eds. R. Francovich, H. Patterson, *Extracting meaning from ploughsoil assemblages*, *The Archaeology of Mediterranean Landscapes* 5, Oxford 2000.

off-site, at least in their original meaning (although the physical limits are often very clearly defined)¹⁰⁵. The material from most prehistoric periods was often found limited to one or a few field units, with little or no finds in the rest of the surveyed area. On the other hand, certain periods were characterized by single large and dense cluster, surrounded by zones of lesser density and sporadic appearance of isolated, tiny clusters further away from the main cluster. One or two assemblages were found dispersed in yet thinner scatters, but limited to the sectors where the main cluster was situated. Especially in the latter case, it is sometimes very difficult to draw even a very flexible site limit, because the finds collected outside the main concentrations are not dispersed in an even carpet. They rather appear in small scattered groups, representing much smaller concentrations than the main cluster, but still several times greater than on the surrounding field units. In principle one can still determine a site threshold, but it is very uncertain if the material scattered on the surrounding fields represents traces of field manure or other types of human occupation. It seems that off-site material resulting from field manure was characteristic only for certain time periods, such as the Late Ottoman and the Early Modern Period and perhaps, the Roman and Late Roman Period¹⁰⁶.

Despite all this the concepts of site and off-site will be retained during the analysis of the material distribution by periods. As will be shown, many of the phenomena observed by surveyors in various parts of the Eastern Mediterranean, such as site core and site halo can also be observed in this survey area¹⁰⁷. The neutral term of satellites will be used for the surrounding, “secondary” clusters. We’ll see that in most instances these are truly smaller and isolated concentrations, though we often failed to decisively document their extent. They simply went unnoticed during the field survey, precisely because of their small size or the predominance of Early Modern off-site finds.

Some of the assemblages are difficult to date with certainty. Indeed it has to be admitted that many fabric groups, especially the coarse ware are hardly datable. Only in cases where it was possible to distinguish a separate coarse fabric and where it appears consistently with more datable fabrics could a tentative dating be suggested. Surprisingly or not, the communities that settled the studied micro-region had a local and rather inert tradition of pottery production. Very few changes were made regarding modelling and decoration during long time-periods. Being locally produced, the pottery from different periods was made of similar raw materials and fabric classification was inevitably a very delicate and tricky process. Above all and in relation to the latter fact, there are hardly any close parallels among the material gathered from the surrounding regions.

In order to make the main text more legible, the detailed descriptions of the surface material distribution by periods and the alternative readings will also be given in a separate appendix, in Appendix II. There the reader can find more explicit information about the ways in

¹⁰⁵ M. Kuna, 78, 1998; E. Neustupný, The transformation of community areas into settlement areas, 45-61, ed. E. Neustupný, 1998.

¹⁰⁶ Indeed once a quantitative approach to the surface archaeological record is adopted, the concepts of site and off-site do become primarily heuristic devices and not true theoretical concepts. T.J. Wilkinson, The definition of ancient manured zones by means of extensive shard-sampling techniques, 323-333, *Journal of Field Archaeology*, 9 1982; J.L. Bintliff, A.M. Snodgrass, 506-513, 1988; J.L. Bintliff, 200-215, eds. M. Pasquinucci, F. Trément, 2000. On the other hand, while theoretically more sound, it is very difficult to operate with the concept of settlement area and its components solely on the base of surface material collections.

¹⁰⁷ J. Bintliff, P. Howard, A. Snodgrass, 15-37, 2007; for different views see, S.E. Alcock, 135-168, ed. I. Morris 1994; D.K. Pettegrew, Chasing the Classical farmstead: assessing the formation and signature of rural settlement in Greek landscape archaeology, 189-209, *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology* 14, 2001.

which we arrived at the interpretations given in the following paragraphs. These will include definitions of the site location, size and inner structure, definitions and interpretations of the off-site zone and the satellite clusters and brief considerations of locational preferences. Finally, because of the complex distributional patterns and the possibility of different interpretations, this chapter will end with a longer summary of the history of habitation in the first survey area, where we'll attempt to make a condensed overview of the long-term developments and insert the local into the broader regional dynamics.

III.1.2 The Middle Neolithic Period (6th millennium BC; tables 1 and 2, Appendix 2)

The earliest community to occupy the survey area is represented by slightly over 800 potshards, exclusively limited to 4 field walking units on the southern tip of sector IX (map III_1b). This assemblage constitutes the greater portion of site 11 (see Appendix I). It is spread over two terraces on the left bank of the central valley, overlooking the junction between the valley and a small ravine that delimits the sector from the east. The material dated to the Middle Neolithic is limited to the western half of the upper and the southern portion of the lower terrace, spreading over field blocks 157, 159, 192 and 193. On these field blocks the transect survey recorded artifact densities ranging from 5 to 26 Mid-Neolithic shards per 1000 sq meters. In contrast, the rest of the 270 field blocks in the survey area featured zero density of Middle-Neolithic finds. These finds were accompanied by a group of later period fabrics, which are mostly concentrated to the east of the Mid-Neolithic cluster, but the two are also largely overlapping. They determine the size and the shape of site 11. There are also negligible amounts of Hellenistic, Roman and Early Modern material (graph 1 in Appendix II).

Total collection by grid units was carried out only on the upper terrace, because of the higher overall artifact density and the visibility conditions. If we focus only on the Mid-Neolithic finds collected by the grid survey, their estimated mean density is 12 per 100 sq meters or nearly half the mean density of all surface finds on this site (map III_2). The maximum density of mid-Neolithic pottery recorded in the southwest portions of the site reaches over 70 fragments per 100 sq meters. From this core they dwindle rather abruptly to less than 2 fragments per 100 sq meters, with a second peak in the central part of the grid. Because of the absence of this material on the rest of the field units, the site limits on the upper terrace are clear. However as discussed in the appendices, it is certain that the Neolithic site also occupied the lower terrace, as well as most of the remaining area of the upper terrace, west of the site core. It is also quite possible that it spread a little bit further to the east, given that its surface presence is smothered by the later assemblage of fabrics, mostly concentrated in the eastern half of the upper terrace. The character of the finds, the presence of storage vessels, flint tools and an almost entirely preserved quern-stone indicate a wide range of occupational activities. In addition, the total collections included a fragment of a seated female figurine and a fragment of an obsidian scraper.

The most obvious and likely interpretation of the survey findings is that the Middle Neolithic site consisted of two roughly equal cores, positioned near the edges of the two terraces. Together they occupied an area of about 8 500 sq meters or nearly 90% of site 11. In terms of quantity they comprise almost 55% of all finds on this site and 4.8% of the total collection in the first survey area (table 1, Appendix II, see table 2 for residual analysis). This is one of the larger nucleated settlements in the studied micro-region. As discussed in Appendix I, it occupies a central position in the survey area providing it with an equally easy access to both the Neogene

soils in the eastern half of the survey and the colluvial deposits on the western bank and on the valley floor. Not surprisingly there are absolutely no traces of off-site activity from this period.

Few other contemporary sites have been discovered so close to the Vardar Valley, especially along the stretches of the valley south of Veles¹⁰⁸. Most of the known Middle Neolithic sites are located in the Neogene basins to the north and east. This could suggest that the prime resource for this community were the lighter Neogene soils in the survey's eastern sectors, more suitable for hoe agriculture¹⁰⁹. The steep eastern and southern sides of the ridge provided relative protection. Nevertheless this settlement occupies a rather exposed location, easily accessed from the floor of the valley or the Ramnište Ridge. It overlooks one of the central cross-roads in this micro-region, where the main east-west artery is joined by a local road leading north, towards the confluence of the rivers Vardar and Pčinja. As will be shown, during some later periods of Sopot's history the local settlements occupied far less exposed locations. At least in the more recent past, the nearest freshwater sources were situated on the valley floor.

There remains the problem of the approximate longevity of this settlement. The assemblage was roughly dated to the Middle Neolithic based on general parallels found on sites in the neighboring regions. There lack the finds characteristic for the Early or the Late Neolithic, although it has to be stressed that these chronological distinctions are mostly based on the analysis of fine painted ware and terracotta figurines¹¹⁰. Judging by the relatively large number of finds and the production and use of at least five different pottery fabrics, it seems plausible to argue that this settlement existed over a longer time-period.

III.1.3 The Late Neolithic (5th and first half of the 4th millennium BC? Tables 3 and 4 in Appendix II)

The most likely candidate for a direct successor of the Mid-Neolithic settlement is a community that produced an undated assemblage of fabrics, mostly overlapping with the Mid-Neolithic assemblage, but also spreading in a thinner carpet over most of sector IX. It consisted of slightly over 380 fragments classed into two basic fabric groups. This assemblage is less than half the size of the Middle Neolithic assemblage, but its dispersal area is nearly 10 times larger (table 3 in Appendix II). The great majority of the finds or nearly 80% were collected from site 11. Already at the time of the transect survey it became evident that this was a site location. The combined quantities of the Middle and the possible Late Neolithic assemblage clearly stood out from the low background densities in sector IX. However after the collected finds were divided into separate assemblages, there arose serious doubts concerning the initial interpretation of the surface record as explicated in Appendix I.

¹⁰⁸ An up to date summary of the known settlements from the Upper Vardar is given in D. Zdravkovski Sreden Neolit vo Gorno-Vardarski Region, 55-63, *Macedonia Acta Arheologica* 18, 2008.

¹⁰⁹ A. Bogaard, The Nature of Early Farming in Central and Southeast Europe, 49-58, *Documenta Praehistorica XXXI* 2004.

¹¹⁰ Radiocarbon data from the Neolithic sites in the regions of the Central Balkans are generally scarce, M. Garašanin, The Stone Age in the Central Balkan Area, 75-186, *Cambridge Ancient History*, volume III, Cambridge 1983; P. Biagi, M. Spataro, New observations on the Radiocarbon Chronology of the Starčevo-Criș and Kőrös Cultures, 35-50, eds. L. Nikolova, J. Fritz, J. Higgins, *Prehistoric Archaeology & Anthropological Theory and Education. RPRP 6-7*, 2005; D. Orton, Herding, Settlement and Chronology in the Balkan Neolithic, 5-40, *European Journal of Archaeology* 15-1 2012

The possible Late Neolithic assemblage succeeds the Middle Neolithic on site 11 (map III_3). As mentioned in the preceding section the two are mostly overlapping, with the core of the undated assemblage situated a couple of dozen meters to the east of the Middle-Neolithic site, in the eastern third of the gridded area. Here the total grid survey recorded a maximum artifact density of nearly 30 fragments per 100 sq meters. There lack a regular concentric on-site pattern. The site on the upper terrace consists of two cores defined by artifact densities higher than 6 fragments per 100 sq meter or more than 3 fragments per grid unit. A peripheral zone of between 1 and 3 fragments per grid unit stretches over most of the gridded area, except for grid units along the northern and western peripheries of the grid. Similarly to the Middle Neolithic cluster on the upper terrace, the two cores are not symmetrical. The smaller and thinner concentration is situated at the southern edge of the terrace, while the much larger one is situated between 5 and 10 meters to the north.

The same arguments supporting the existence of a Middle Neolithic cluster on the lower terrace apply to the distribution of the undated assemblage. That this site spread over to the lower terrace is demonstrated by the high artifact densities recorded by the transect collections, at least 2-3 times as high as on the rest of the field walking units, including field block 157. Compensating for the low ground visibility and the lesser degree of survey intensity will elevate the artifact density on field units 192-193 to an on-site level, but not on the rest of the field units where this material was collected. The total collection on the small cleared parcel on field block 159 also revealed on-site artifact densities. Like the Mid-Neolithic site, this settlement spread both over the upper and the lower terrace, possibly occupying a slightly larger area, nearing 1 hectare.

The collections from the other field units in this sector, from field blocks 160-162 or 168-171 must also be treated as distinct site locations. What remains unclear is their exact size and extent. After the analysis of the results, we adopted the interpretation that these are series of small and thin clusters featuring artifact densities not greater than 1.5 fragments per 100 sq meters, when corrected for the visibility factor and the lower degree of survey intensity (map III_4a). This is well-above the district mean densities recorded by the grid surveys, but it barely equals the densities recorded on the periphery of site 11. Nevertheless if we focus only the transect collections, there are absolutely no grounds to distinguish between site 11 and the rest of the field blocks on which this material was encountered (table 4, Appendix II). This observation remains valid even if we assume that the transect collections were equally thorough on all field units (map III_4c). Because of the low resolution of the field block survey their exact extent remains unknown, but assuming that these were separate settlement locations would produce a nearly impossible pattern of three settlements each measuring roughly one hectare, all situated within an area of slightly over 15 hectares. However one shouldn't exclude the possibility that we are dealing with the remains of a shifting settlement and that these locations weren't occupied at the same time. Judging by the quality of the material outside the limits of site 11 and their inconspicuousness during fieldwork, it is more likely that during this unknown prehistoric period, just as during most other periods when the surveyed basin was occupied, there was one central settlement, in this case situated on the two terraces covered by field blocks 157 and 192-193, accompanied by a series of smaller satellites situated hundreds of meters from the main settlement site.

This peculiar distribution pattern once again raises the question of the chronology of the assemblage. In regional archaeology it is usually assumed that during the three millennia of the Neolithic Period, all settlements were nucleated. But it must be stressed that the survey method

used in this survey has no precedence in the surrounding regions. The methods of landscape exploration used by the majority of local archaeologists are ill-suited for discovering and documenting dispersed sites. Although far more widespread, the two concentrations north of site 11 are thinner and probably consist of a number of tiny and isolated clusters. Unless resulting from some unknown post-depositional processes, the amounts recorded on these locations suggest much less intensive occupation, on the order of extensive burial ground or industrial activities. At most these satellite clusters could represent the remains of isolated dwellings or huts, representing a strikingly different pattern of habitation in comparison to the highly nucleated Mid-Neolithic settlement. It is difficult to bring forward even a highly speculative interpretation, in the absence of comparable data from the nearby regions¹¹¹. Nevertheless it is indicative that most, but not all prehistoric assemblages from this survey area exhibit similar distribution pattern. The nearly total nucleation exhibited by the Middle Neolithic assemblage will never be repeated in the later periods of human occupation in the first survey area.

Most decisive for the tentatively proposed dating were certain fabric and formal features, such as the rim shapes and decoration techniques. Diagnostic fragments of this group feature simple vertical rims, very similarly shaped to those seen in fabrics dated to the Mid-Neolithic, but also fragments decorated with barbotine. On some examples it was possible to observe very small amounts of grass temper, preserved as linear voids on the surface. This feature is also characteristic for Neolithic pottery production and rarely occurs in later periods. It must be stressed that there lack direct parallels from sites dated through excavation. However very similar pottery was found on a Middle to Late Neolithic site, situated at the northern entrance of the Taor Canyon. At the same time it has to be admitted that even if this assemblage truly belongs to early prehistory, in general it shows little resemblance to the prevalent Middle Neolithic fabric groups. This circumstance suggests that there was probably no direct continuity between the two overlapping settlements.

The community that produced this assemblage occupied the location of the Middle Neolithic site, making use of its central position, command over the local roads and easy access to the floor of the central valley and the easily arable Neogene deposits of the eastern half of this micro-region. In this respect the other two locations where clusters of this material were found are to a certain degree less favorable. The nearest freshwater springs are hundreds of meters away and the humus layer is probably thinner than on the tip or the lower terraces of the ridge. Although withdrawn from the central section of the area, these are open and unprotected locations. Nevertheless a similar location, site 12, on field block 167 was certainly fully occupied sometime during the Hellenistic and perhaps the Early Roman Period.

III.1.4 The Bronze Age (3rd and 2nd millennium BC, until ca. 1200 BC, tables 5, 6 and graph 2, Appendix II)

The settlement on site 11 was definitely deserted by the time of the Eneolithic, at the latest. There are no traces of human occupation in the survey area during the second half of the

¹¹¹ A similarly dispersed settlement, with one central and a few satellite clusters dated to the Late to Final Neolithic have been recorded in far-away Laconia, on the southern Peloponnese, W. Cavanagh, Joost Crouwel, The Survey Area in the Prehistoric Periods, 121-150, W. Cavanagh, J. Crouwel, R.W.V. Catling, G. Shipley et al. *The Laconia Survey: Continuity and Change in a Greek Rural Landscape*, Volume I, London 2002.

4th millennium BC. It seems that this episode of complete or near complete desertion of the will be repeated only in a few other periods of the past.

The following Early and especially the Middle Bronze Age are among the least understood periods in domestic archaeology. Comparatively a rather small number of sites are dated to this period and only a few were excavated. Our knowledge about the pottery production at the time is particularly limited¹¹². Luckily a very small assemblage with a distinct and characteristic assemblage was recognized as a Bronze Age material by a colleague from the National Museum, though it wasn't possible to date it more precisely¹¹³. It consists of at least three distinct fabric groups, each represented by several or a dozen finds. But despite the small size of the collection, the finds are nicely preserved and a number of fragments have preserved traces of matt reddish slip on the surface. As discussed in Appendix I, this could be related to the fact that these artefacts were probably unearthed not long before the grid collection.

The bulk of the finds datable to this period were collected from sector I, from a garden in the yard of the monastic complex (mapsIII_5, 6). This is field block 5b covered by grid 16b. Discussing the distribution of the overall surface record, this cluster was defined as site 3 (see Appendix I). Because of the peculiar conditions surrounding its location and discovery, especially the presence of uncultivated parcels and monastic outbuildings along the edges of the field, it is very probable that only a portion of the site area was revealed by the grid survey. The couple of dozen fragments collected from site 3 occupied an area of 800 sq meters, including the site periphery. The site core is defined by artifact densities higher than 8 fragments per 100 sq meters or 4 fragments per grid unit. It was discovered in the southeastern end of the grid, on the right bank of a small seasonal creek that drains the rugged terrain on the Vardar's left bank. Taking into account only the zone of over 2 fragments per grid unit, the Bronze Age site measures at least 300 sq meters. Sites of this size can only be interpreted as the remains of individual farmsteads. The farm exploited the narrow terraces on the floor of the Taor Canyon. A larger nucleated settlement can hardly be expected on this location as cultivable land on the Vardar's left bank is limited to an area of a few hectares.

But the individual transect collections indicate that the Bronze Age material also spread over to the other side of the creek, on field block 6 (table 6, Appendix II). The small collection comprising several fragments from the northernmost individual transect on this field unit probably came from a separate core. Because of the low ground visibility and survey intensity, it is impossible to determine its size and relation to site 3. But knowing that the same collection technique from field 5b yielded not a single fragment datable to the Bronze Age, one shouldn't exclude the possibility that the two cores were of a similar size. Only on field block 6 did the transect collections included finds datable to the Bronze Age.

This assemblage is not limited to sector I. A couple of certain and another couple of possible Bronze Age finds were recognized among the grid collections from later period sites in sectors III, V and VII (mapsIII_5, 7). The couple of securely identified fragments came from the southeast corner of site 5a, about 150 meters west of the modern village. Possible Bronze Age shards were collected from sites 6 and 8; the first situated immediately northeast of the village, the second approximately half a kilometer to the northeast, at Prisoj's eastern foot. When these isolated finds are translated into density values, they hardly approach the limit of 1 fragment per 100 sq meters. This is surely above the survey's and sector's mean values for the Bronze Age,

¹¹² Z. Videvski, *Bronzenoto Vreme na Vardarski Rid*, 91-113, ed. D. Mitrevski, *Vardarski Rid-Staromakedonski grad*, vol I, Skopje 2005.

¹¹³ Courtesy of Z. Videvski, a custodian at the Archaeological Museum of Macedonia, in Skopje.

but they are well below the densities recorded on the periphery of site 3. In this respect they are analogous to the satellite clusters of the undated assemblage in sector IX, although in the case of the small Bronze Age assemblage they appear at much greater distances from the “central” cluster. The circumstances in which these satellite clusters were discovered are also different. The larger satellite clusters of the undated assemblage were found in a peripheral and underexploited survey sector, with little background noise. In contrast, the isolated Bronze Age fragments were discovered on later period settlement sites, some of which were multi-period. Intensive survey projects in Greece have shown that the occurrence of prehistoric material in such tiny amounts is not untypical, particularly on sites of larger settlements from later historical periods¹¹⁴. Later building and agricultural activities ensure that only a tiny fraction of the older remains survive in the surface record. It needs to be pointed out that sectors III, V and VII are going to become the most intensely cultivated and inhabited portion of the survey area in later periods. Therefore we allowed the possibility that these were the vestigial remains of sites of similar size and rank to those of site 3 in the monastic complex. Nevertheless we are more inclined to view the more substantial cluster found in the monastic complex as truly representing a larger settlement.

Only the finds collected from sites 3 and 5a and from field block 6 can securely be attributed to the Bronze Age. If the isolated shards from sites 6 and 8 are nonetheless treated as possible Bronze Age finds and plotted alongside the securely dated material, there emerges a pattern of one central site in sector I and a series of tiny find-spots marking the locations of smaller or even similarly sized establishments spaced at roughly regular intervals of 300-400 meters along Prisoj’s southern and eastern foot (map III_7). The possibility that settlement was more widespread in the survey area during the Bronze Age shouldn’t be dismissed. As will be shown, a more recognizable fabric category datable to the Late Bronze Age exhibits a very similar distribution pattern of tiny clusters spaced at equal distances on the west bank of the central valley. Even if the possible existence of a network of small, short-lived farms is left aside and we concentrate on the securely dated evidence, the size and the location of the two Bronze Age clusters on sites 3 and 5a indicate a preference for dispersed rather than nucleated settlement. This extremely dispersed scheme of isolated farmsteads or huts is clearly different from that of the period represented by the undated assemblage when a larger hamlet-sized settlement was surrounded by satellite clusters, all situated within a distance of a few hundreds meters from the central cluster. Understandably because of the low chronological resolution we cannot be sure if these clusters formed a contemporary network or if we are seeing the collapsed image of a number of subsequent phases. Acknowledging that this assemblage could theoretically span over nearly 2 millennia, the latter option seems more likely¹¹⁵.

Site 3 clearly occupied a strategically important location in a local context, but as will be shown it is much more sheltered in comparison to sites 5a or 6. The importance of this sector in the local communication network was discussed in chapter II. Its main disadvantage is the sheer scarcity of fertile and cultivable stretches of land on the canyon floor and especially on the Vardar’s left bank. It is difficult to imagine a larger nucleated community settling on this location unless it’s assumed that it cultivated the land on the opposite bank. On the other hand, the faint traces found in the southern half of site 5a occupy a type of location that will become highly favored in later periods. This small installation is perhaps the earliest that made use of the

¹¹⁴ Cf. J.L. Bintliff, P. Howard, et al, 1999; C. Mee, H. Forbes, eds. *A rough and rocky place: The landscape and settlement history of Methana Peninsula, Greece*, Liverpool 1997; J.C. Wright, et al., 579-659, 1990.

¹¹⁵ J.F. Cherry, 19 1982.

colluvial sediments covering most of the surface of the survey's western half. It was positioned on an open and exposed location, in the centre of the agricultural land of the modern village. 150 meters to the north, there is an active freshwater spring. Regarding settlement location, it is the small vestigial remains at Prisoj's southern foot that will set the precedent for the location of later settlements in the survey area, not the farmstead on site 3. During the following three millennia and up until the present-day, the flat and fertile stretches between the foot of Prisoj and the central valley will remain the most intensely inhabited section of the studied micro-region.

III.1.5 The Late Bronze Age (1600-1200 BC, tables 7-9 in Appendix II)

Only one fabric group among the collected finds can be associated with this period, though there is an equal possibility that it is later. The chief problem with the dating of this group is that it appears alongside different assemblages. It is thus very uncertain if it represents a separate archaeological period. The greatest concentration of these finds was found at site 3, in the monastic complex (maps III_8b and 9, tables 8, 9, Appendix II). Here it accounts for about 13% of the total collection. It doesn't follow closely the distribution of the Bronze Age material spreading slightly further to the northwest. If these finds are to be treated as representing a separate phase of occupation on site 3, then evidently the site core has moved to the north. It is even smaller than the Bronze Age site measuring only about 200 sq meters, with a maximum artifact density of 5 fragments per 100 sq meters. The possible core on the opposite bank of the seasonal creek was definitely abandoned.

The other half of these finds was found dispersed in several tiny clusters on sites 7, 8 and at the foot of site 9 (map III_10). On these locations the predominant material can be dated either to the transitional Late Bronze-Early Iron Age (1200 to 1000 BC) or the Late Iron Age (7th - 6th centuries BC). There is a possibility that they were accompanied by a small amount of less recognizable Bronze Age finds. However considering that the ratio of fabrics dated to the Bronze Age and the Late Bronze Age at site 3 is nearly 3 to 1, one would expect to find at least a similar situation in the other sectors of the survey. Instead the Late Bronze Age fabric appears more consistently alongside fabrics dated to the Late Bronze-Early Iron Age.

Finds that belong to this fabric group at least four times appear on two or three contingent grid units. The artifact density never exceeds the limit of 2 fragments per 100 sq meters or 1 fragment per grid unit. In addition individual fragments appear on isolated grid units in-between the larger clusters. On the south, this series of closely spaced find-spots terminated with a pair of fragments collected by individual transects on field block 94. Apart from field block 5b in the monastic complex, this is the second largest concentration of Late Bronze Age finds collected by the individual field walking transects. It is thus possible that there was a larger concentration immediately to the south of site 7 that wasn't included in the grid survey. On the north at the foot of site 9, individual fragment were collected from field blocks 113 and 114, but the total grid survey covering the eastern half of these two field blocks didn't detect examples of this fabric group.

This pattern is evidently similar to the distribution of the Bronze Age material and its interpretation is even more difficult given the possibility that this fabric group was a part of a larger assemblage. The fact that these scattered finds appear on later period sites points to an interpretation identical to that applied to the isolated Bronze Age finds. These are the vestigial remains of a dispersed network of small farms or more likely, a single or a few farmsteads shifting their locations along the valley's western bank. To be sure, the fact that roughly equal

quantities were collected from both off-site and later periods' sites is slightly confusing. As it is possible that this fabric group was accompanied by other fabric groups, one should be reserved about the authenticity of the pattern presented on map III_10.

In the case of the Late Bronze Age fabric group, the distance between the more concentrated find-spot on site 3 and the ultra-thin carpet along the valley's right bank is over two kilometers. If this fabric group truly represents a separate period, then there were at least two separate settlement units in the survey area during the Late Bronze Age. The finds dated to the Late Bronze Age are the first to appear in larger quantities on sectors west of the central valley. They don't follow the distribution of the few Bronze Age finds, but appear several hundreds of meters to the northeast, in sector VII. These are the narrow, but protected eastern foothills of the Prisoj. During the Late Iron Age, this entire stretch will be permanently inhabited. It is a far less exposed location compared to that occupied by the small hypothetical Bronze Age farm on site 5a. At the same time, it is centrally positioned in the studied micro-region, with an easy access to the fields at the southern foot of Prisoj and on the floor of the central valley. As mentioned in the previous chapter, there are freshwater springs on several locations along the valley floor.

It has to be remembered that it is quite possible that this group of finds is only a part of some other assemblage. Understandably in such a case, the clusters discussed in the preceding paragraphs are artificial phenomena and shouldn't be analyzed in isolation. It seemed worthwhile to carry out a separate analysis, because from its pattern of distribution it appears more like a predecessor than a component of the succeeding Late Bronze-Early Iron Age assemblage.

III.1.6 The Dark Ages/Early Iron Age (1200-1000; 1000-800 BC, tables 10-12, graphs 3 and 4, Appendix II)

Two rather different assemblages can be dated to this long epoch. Both comprised several different fabric groups, some of which were clearly function specific. Though not lacking in diversity, it is difficult to observe function specific groups in the earlier prehistoric assemblages. These mainly consist of two broad categories of coarse ware; one characterized by the presence of numerous and poorly sorted grains of a black volcanic rock, the other by the large amounts of silvery mica leafs. The few diagnostic pieces indicate that cooking pots and portable stoves were probably made in these fabrics. We'll find them appearing side by side on a number of sites from different periods, which naturally creates problems of interpretation on multi-period sites. Once introduced, the production of these fabrics will continue with few visible changes for a period of over one millennium.

The first of the two assemblages, the one that accompanies the Late Bronze Age fabric group, consists of several fabric groups characterized by the firing technique and the surface finish. It again resembles some aspects of the Late Bronze Age pottery production. Over 400 fragments were classed into some of these fabric groups. To these, one should add about 100 fragments of a coarse ware that were found alongside the rest of the assemblage, but can't be clearly distinguished from a similar group used in later periods. In total this assemblage comprises slightly over 3% of the total collection (table 10, Appendix II). It is larger than all previous assemblages except for the Mid-Neolithic, but one has to account for the fact that this material was produced over a much shorter period of time. A thin, discontinuous carpet spreads over the greater part of the western bank, from the houses of the modern village to site 9, situated over a kilometer to the north (map III_11a). It is interrupted around the middle of this stretch by the large concentration of Late Iron Age finds on site 8. This is an even more extensive carpet

than the one formed by the possible Late Neolithic assemblage on the eastern bank of the central valley.

The transect survey recorded very high artifact densities or between 14 and 19 fragments per 1000 sq meters on two pairs of field units, 103-95a and 102a/b situated only about 100 meters apart in the central parts of sector VII (table 11, Appendix II). On the neighbouring field blocks the artifact density decreases to less than 4 fragments per 1000 sq meters, rising again over this limit on field blocks couple of hundreds meters to the north and south of the zone of maximum density. On a field block south of the Skopje-Thessalonica highway and on the eastern periphery of the modern village, it nearly reaches 1 fragment per 100 sq meters. Similar densities were recorded on two field blocks at the foot of site 9, almost half a kilometer to the north of field block 103. The difference between the densities recorded on the pair of field units 103-95a and 102a/b and those on field units to the south and north was at least twofold and it seemed obvious that we were again dealing with a dispersed network of dwellings and outbuildings, gravitating around one or two larger foci. At the same time, one shouldn't exclude the possibility that there was a continuous carpet of finds, stretching south of the cluster on field block 103 and into sector IV, on some of the fields east of the village.

A slightly different pattern emerges when the transect collections are adjusted to represent 100% of the counted material (map III_11b). In case all counted material was collected by individual transects, the concentration on field block 103 gains further prominence, clearly spreading over the neighbouring field block to the north. Density decreases on the presumed second focus on field blocks 102a/b, bringing it closer to the clusters on field blocks to the north of the central site. At the same time another potential focus emerges on field block 80. Along with the neighbouring field block 87, they practically equal in density the cluster on field blocks 95a, 103 and 104. The difference between the two is that the latter appear at the southern periphery of the total dispersal area of the Late Bronze-Early Iron Age material and are not surrounded by field blocks featuring intermediary artifact density. In other words, the concentrations on field blocks 80 and 87 do not produce a site halo and in this respect they are analogous to the satellite clusters of the undated assemblage.

The results of the total grid survey chiefly confirmed this pattern. The main settlement during this phase was discovered on the pair of field blocks 95a-103. According to the total grid survey there is a small but very dense concentration of finds in the southwest corner of the grid, on the border between field blocks 95a and 103. It occupies an area of about 1250 sq meters featuring a maximum artifact density of over 50 fragments per 100 sq meters. The artifact density declines rather sharply towards the eastern and northern periphery of field block 103 and it was thought that this marks the settlement limits. But as suggested by the analysis of the transect collections record, the grid survey on the neighbouring field block to the north revealed a dense network of smaller and thinner cores with artifact densities higher than 10 fragments per 100 sq meters, well above the intermediary densities recorded on the periphery of "site 7" (grid 9 on table 12, Appendix II). It extended over the greater portion of field block 104, gradually becoming sparser on the eastern third of the gridded area, but not towards its northern periphery where some of the denser cores were discovered. This extensive area of high and intermediary density must be interpreted as a continuation of "site 7". Excluding it from the site area would imply that this is a halo zone interspersed with outbuildings, burials and ancient manure. This is highly unlikely because it also implies that a small farmstead occupying a mere 0.1 hectare can produce such an extensive and uneven site halo. We rather adopted the view that these smaller and sparser satellite cores are isolated dwellings, each measuring not more than 150 sq meters.

As shown on the thematic map, they are regularly surrounded by at least one or two grid units with average or low artifact densities, repeating the inner distribution on the central cluster (map III_12). In all likelihood they formed an integral but dispersed settlement, with “site 7” representing the focus of the network. The similarities with the pattern exhibited by the more restricted Late Bronze Age fabric group are unmistakable.

This network of isolated dwellings and huts almost certainly continues to spread to the north and south of the central cluster. The total grid collections in this part of the survey mainly aimed at documenting the much larger cluster defined as site 8 in Appendix I. Luckily we were rather confident that this site continued over field block 104 and gridded the entire field. This is how we discovered the continuation of “site 7”. However a number of field blocks where the transect survey recorded higher than average artifact density in the southern half of sector VII were left out of the grid survey, because of the lower overall density and the absence of feature shards. Compensating for the lesser degree of survey intensity and the low ground visibility conditions would barely elevate the density records to a site-halo level and this is true only for a few field blocks, including the pair 102a-b about 100 meters east of “site 7” and field blocks 80 and 87, 250 to 300 meters to the south. But knowing that field block 104 featuring an even lower than average density produced almost a dozen small clusters after being gridded, one would expect to see a similar pattern behind the increased densities on field blocks 102a-b, 95a, 80 and 87.

This interpretation was seemingly challenged by the total grid surveys to the north of field block 104. Although we gridded an area nearly 4 hectares large, the total collections included but a handful of fragments, dispersed mostly along the periphery of the later site 8. Only on field block 113a, at the southern foot of site 9 and almost 500 meters away from “site 7” do we see another one of the small clusters of Late Bronze-Early Iron Age material. It too behaves like a residential site in miniature, with a maximum of 10 fragments per 100 sq meters and a gradual transition to the off-site, marked by a narrow belt where artifact density ranges between 2 and 6 fragments per 100 sq meters (map III_13). The sudden disappearance of these clusters perfectly coincides with the very large concentration of Late Iron Age finds that constitutes site 8. Because of its size and later chronology, but also because of the fact that the Late Bronze-Early Iron Age finds appear consistently along the periphery of the larger site 8, it was concluded that parts of the dispersed settlement were completely obscured by later activities and the sheer quantities of the Late Iron Age finds. As the results of the grid survey on field blocks at the southern and western foot of site 9 demonstrate, the network of isolated dwellings was predictably becoming sparser as one moves away from the central cluster on “site 7”. The few scattered fragments collected from the grid at the western foot of site 9, on field blocks where the transect survey indicated average and higher than average artifact densities warns us against giving too much weight to the increased densities recorded by the transect survey. Interestingly not a single fragment was collected from field units in sector V, at the southern foot of Prisoj.

Because of its dispersed character, the Late Bronze-Early Iron Age settlement was only partly documented and it is difficult to give a precise estimate of the settlement area. Adding up the dozen small clusters revealed on field block 104 to the central cluster on “site 7” would more than double the occupied area. We further must allow that there were at least as many unrevealed clusters on field blocks to the south and to the north, beneath the dense layer of Late Iron Age material. If this interpretation of the survey record is correct, we would have to assume that this settlement occupied a minimum of 5000 sq meters. In all likelihood there are more than a dozen

unrecorded satellites, although one also has to allow for possible burial remains, industrial and agricultural activities.

By the end of the 2nd millennium BC, settlement in the survey area has almost returned to the pre-Bronze Age level. The settlement that produced these remains was only slightly smaller than the Mid-Neolithic settlement and its descendant on site 11. It was focused on the same area where fragments of the Late Bronze Age fabric group were found. This is sector VII or the eastern foothills of the Prisoj, the narrow stretch between its slope and the central valley. Although not very spacious, this location offers an easy access both to arable land and fresh water. At the same time it is less exposed than the insolated and spacious southern foothills. Focusing on the micro-locations of the revealed clusters, it is possible to observe a preference for slightly elevated and protected positions. This is particularly evident at site 9, where one of the discovered foci was positioned at the very foot of a small hillock that was fortified probably sometime during the Roman Period. "Site 7" too occupies the low ridge that separates the eastern and southern foothills of Prisoj, standing slightly higher than the surrounding fields.

III.1.7 The Early Iron Age? (1000-800BC) Tables 13-14, graphs 5-6, Appendix II)

The second assemblage datable to the period between 1200 and 800 BC occupies a completely different location in the survey area and features a very different distribution pattern. It consists of several fabric groups, again very unlike the previous assemblage. In fact they are so similar to the fabrics of the Late Iron Age assemblage that it is often impossible to distinguish between certain examples. Yet the core locations of the two assemblages are hundreds of meters apart: the possible Early Iron Age assemblage is concentrated on sites 5a, 5b and 6, in the western survey sectors, while the Late Iron Age material was found concentrated on site 8, partly overlapping with the material datable to the Late Bronze-Early Iron Age (maps III_15b). If the proposed chronology of these assemblages proves correct, it would imply rather dramatic displacements during the long period of transition from the Bronze to the Iron Age. It suggests that the eastern foothills of Prisoj, probably occupied during the Late Bronze Age were almost completely abandoned for a new location, about 350 meters west of "site 7". This was again however a relatively short-lived settlement, because during the Late Iron Age or the 7th and 6th centuries, the eastern foothills of the Prisoj are again occupied by a settlement far larger than any of its predecessors or successors. As with the assemblage discussed previously, it is possible that a small fraction of the finds collected from the latter site belonged to some of the Early Iron Age fabric groups, but went unnoticed because of the great similarity between the two assemblages. It has to be noted though, that not a single fragment belonging to these fabric groups was found in the fields surrounding the Late Iron Age site.

The dating of this assemblage remains problematic. Most of the Late Iron Age fabric groups have been securely dated thanks to the excavations of parts of the mound necropolis, dispersed over most of sector X and parts of sector IX¹¹⁶. The fabric groups for which an Early Iron Age date is proposed, sometimes feature shapes and decorative patterns more characteristic for the first two centuries of the 1st millennium BC. On the other hand, it is not very likely that this material post-dates the Late Iron Age assemblage, as there lack examples of some fabrics characteristic for this period, such as Gray Paionian or Black Gloss ware. Both of these groups

¹¹⁶ D. Petački, Dabici-nekropola od postaro Železno Vreme 71-73, *Arheološki Pregled* 26, 1986; D. Mitrevski, 1997 92-96; A. Papazovska-Sanev, *Keramika od Železnoto Vreme po dolinata na Vardar* 19-20, unpublished MA thesis, 2006.

were present on the Late Iron Age site and examples of Gray Paionian were particularly numerous. Nevertheless the proposed Early Iron Age dating is merely seen as most reasonable at the moment; it is far from definitive. As it appears alongside Roman-Late Roman material on site 5a, it is impossible to determine if certain coarse fabrics belong to this or to the Roman assemblage.

In the case of this assemblage, the transect survey records point rather unambiguously to the possible site locations. This is also illustrated by the statistical distribution of the finds (table 13, Appendix II). Only 6% of all finds datable to this period were collected by individual field walking transects and they all came from 10 field units in sectors III and V, at Prisoj's southern foot. The maximum dispersal area of this material measures about 1.4 hectares, only slightly larger than the entire carpet of Middle Neolithic finds. After the Mid-Neolithic material this is probably the most concentrated group of finds in the survey area.

The ten field units where we found Early Iron Age material are not contingent and they exhibit significant differences in the densities recorded by the transect survey. This circumstance eliminates most of the problems encountered during the interpretation of the more dispersed finds, such as those of the undated or the Late Bronze-Early Iron Age assemblage. Thus field blocks 66 and 44 clearly stand out with over 8 and 6.5 shards per 1000 sq meters, 50 to 100% higher than on the rest of the field blocks where this material was present (table 14, Appendix II). This difference is even more pronounced if we calculate the fraction of the collected Early Iron Age finds in the total sum of counted finds (map III_15b). Lower quantities were discovered on field block 31, situated at about equal distance from field blocks 66 and 44, as well as on field blocks neighbouring the latter two, 65 and 53 and 44b-45a. It quickly became clear that the main focus of activity was on field blocks 52 and 66, but we were surprised to discover substantial quantities among the transect collections from field blocks 31 and 44, after the processing of the finds. The few finds collected from field blocks 31, 68 and 69, about 100 meters east and west of the main focus represent the extremely scant site halo, characteristic for this phase.

The total grid surveys on field blocks 44-44a, 45a-45b (defined as site 5a-b in Appendix I) and field blocks 66, 52-53 (site 6) confirmed and clarified the interpretation proposed on the basis of the transect survey records (maps III_16, 17). As for most prehistoric assemblages in this survey area, the differences between the quantities picked up by the transect and the total grid collections are worryingly high. This discrepancy must be related to the low obtrusiveness of this material in the overall surface record. Only field block 31 escaped the close scrutiny of the total grid collections. However it has to be emphasized that on this field unit, individual transect collections were more thorough because we noted the presence of a small concentration of Roman pottery of unusual quality for this survey area. Although the presence of an Early Iron Age activity on this field unit is beyond any doubt, the density of slightly over 4 fragments per 1000 sq meters is artificially enhanced by the more intensive collections by individual transects. If collections from this field block were similar to collections from the rest of the field units, the recorded density would have certainly been lower (map III_15b).

Site 6 was already recognized during fieldwork stage and the aim of gridding field blocks 66, 52 and partly 53 was to document the extent of this cluster. Although it is situated less than 100 meters from the last of the village houses and swamped by the large amounts of Late Ottoman-Early Modern off-site debris, the site limits and inner structure came out very clearly. The site area is defined by the threshold of 6.5 fragments per 100 sq meters, with very high densities of over 20 fragments per 100 sq meters, concentrated along a narrow strip on field block 66 and partly extending over field block 52. The maximum density of slightly over 40

fragments per 100 sq meters was recorded in the centre of this strip. The entire site area has an elongated shape and measured about 4000 sq meters, excluding the zone of less than 6.5 fragments per 100 sq meters. This is the site halo forming a continuous peripheral belt, at least 15 to 20 meters wide. The rare fragments recognized amidst the total collections from grid 6 located about 100 meters northeast of site 6 mark the limits of the impact zone of this site.

The Early Iron Age phase on site 5a-b was only recognized after the study of the collected finds. Field blocks 44-44a, 45-45a were included in the total grid survey because of the visible presence of Roman and Late Roman material, particularly architectural ceramics. The discovery of a small collection of Early Iron Age material from these sites came as a great surprise and only after repeated study of the collected material. Although the finds attributed to the Early Iron Age assemblage form a discontinuous and a relatively thin cluster barely equalling the densities recorded on the periphery of site 6, the fact that they are superimposed by a later period site must be taken into account. Despite the seemingly irregular pattern, the Early Iron Age finds are clearly concentrated in the northeast quarter of the gridded area. It is even possible to observe a larger concentration of finds on a few grid units in the northern half of field block 44, surrounded by a ring of grid units featuring average artifact densities. Into the southern half of field block 44 and over most of field block 44a, the density of the Early Iron Age finds remains low but constant, with only a few sparse fragments collected from field blocks 45a-b, on the other side of the ravine that delimits site 5a from the west. This roughly concentric pattern, along with the fact that the collection comprises a full domestic assemblage indicates that site 5a had another pre-Roman phase dating to the Early Iron Age. Despite the fairly low on-site densities, this cluster extends over a considerable area and it was suggested that it represents the remains of a settlement of similar size to that on site 6.

Both sites were nucleated settlements, most probably of the rank of small hamlets. In terms of occupied area they are close to the preceding Late Bronze-Early Iron Age settlement and smaller than the Middle Neolithic and the possible Late Neolithic phases on site 11. This material was evidently highly concentrated on the site areas, with scatters of low density and lacking apparent focus on field blocks 68, 31 and 45a. They exhibit one quality that distinguishes them from all previous settlements in the survey area. On both sites it was possible to observe a continuous peripheral belt measuring a minimum width of 15-20 meters and gradually disappearing into an even more extensive zone of less than 1 fragment per 100 sq meters. To be sure, the phenomenon of site halos could be observed even on the smallest Bronze Age sites or on the individual clusters of Late Bronze-Early Iron Age finds, but they were usually more limited and rarely formed a continuous peripheral rings around the site area. Most of the settlement sites from later periods will feature a similarly extensive site halos.

The advantages of the location occupied by site 5a were discussed earlier. This is an exposed location, dominating over the surrounding fields. It is situated at the natural entrance into this micro-region and exerts a close control over access to the Vardar's Valley floor. In its immediate vicinity, at the very foot of Prisoj there is an active freshwater spring. Site 5a is situated at the western edge of the fertile stretch of colluvium lying at the southern foot of Prisoj. Site 6 on the other hand occupies the very centre of this stretch. It is only 250 meters north of the centre of the modern village, on a slightly higher ground, just outside the village periphery. This is in practice the same location, the modern village being situated closer to the central valley. The occupants of site 6 obviously showed little concern for matters such as protection or even a symbolic, physical delimitation of the settled area. Nothing in the micro-relief suggests that this

was a potential archaeological site. Most other sites in this survey area, although lying on flat ground occupy less exposed locations, with access usually limited to one or two directions.

The fact that two, at least roughly contemporary settlements occupied different locations within a distance of 500 meters seems difficult to accept. Despite the great similarities in the pottery production, it is very unlikely that a site of a similar size would pass unnoticed amidst the Late Iron Age material. Against the assumption that the two sites are part of a network of farms or hamlets stands their relative size. Both sites spread over an area of at least 4 000 sq meters. In earlier periods settlements in this micro-region feature only slightly greater size and they were the sole focus of activity during the respective time periods. The clusters of contemporary material were usually many times smaller than the central focus. In this case we have two settlements of a similar size, situated at a distance of less than 500 meters measured from the site cores. Moreover site 5a is bounded by an uncultivable, rocky stretch to the west. Both settlements were thus inevitably looking towards the fertile stretch at the southern foot of Prisoj or sectors III and V. The amount of the finds gathered, as well as the character of the material eliminates the possibility that the two sites were in fact, a settlement and its communal cemetery. Admittedly it took a great effort to realize that part of the collection from site 5a consisted of fabrics identical to those encountered on site 6. The material on the surface of site 6 is fairly well preserved and there are many examples of fine, sometimes decorated table ware. In contrast to this, the finds from site 5a are for the greater part badly worn and appear visibly coarser. Only a very small percentage could be classed as fine pottery and exhibited surface treatment and decorative techniques identical to those seen on site 6. Perhaps this reflects certain functional or chronological differences between the two sites, but it seems more likely that it is simply a result of the different preservation states of the two assemblages. The fact that the settlement on site 5a was reoccupied during the Roman-Late Roman Period further contributed to the worn character of the collected finds.

III.1.8 The Late Iron Age (7th and 6th century BC, table 15-16, graphs 7-9, Appendix II)

The 1980's rescue excavations on the mound necropolis occupying the Jakupica Ridge (sector X) and partly stretching over the neighbouring ridge of Ramnište¹¹⁷, firmly placed Sopot into the network of Late Iron Age sites in the regions of the Middle and Upper Vardar Valley and the adjacent regions to the east. As was the case with most other mound necropoleis from the period, the location of the contemporary settlement remained unknown. There was no decisive evidence on the two known sites in the immediate vicinity. In both cases these were fortified hill-tops dating to the Middle and Late Roman Period. As nearly all known Iron Age sites were found on hill-tops, no one expected to reveal that fabrics datable to the Late Iron Age were by far the most predominant category in the surface record along the western bank of the valley of Sopot, opposite the mound necropolis. Nearly one third or over 5 500 of the 16 525 collected shards can be dated to this period. Moreover they were found almost exclusively in sectors west of the central valley, where their share in the total collection rises to nearly 38%. Even if the material of all previous periods was summed up, it would still comprise less than 15% of the total collection. The second most numerous material in the surface record, the debris discarded in the course of the last two centuries, comprises about 26.5%, although it's spread over a much larger area. Most of the collected finds matched the material excavated from the mound necropolis, confirming

¹¹⁷ Gj. Petački 71, 1986; D. Mitrevski 92-96, 1997.

that the contemporary settlement was situated on low and open terrain, on the west side of the central valley¹¹⁸.

Comparing the mean densities recorded by the grid and the transect survey (table 15, Appendix II), it is clear that this material isn't evenly distributed across the landscape, despite its large dispersal area. The bulk of the material is concentrated on a certain number of field blocks. Only about 150 fragments were collected by individual transects, including both field blocks within and outside the limits of the gridded area. Like the Early Iron Age finds, this material is not very obtrusive in the surface record, regardless of its appearing in very large quantities. As explained in the appendices, it was the character of the finds rather than their quantity that drew our attention. Almost none of the field blocks where the Late Iron Age finds were discovered belonged to the group with very high overall densities.

Looking at the distribution of the Late Iron Age finds by field walking blocks, one observes greater concentration of finds on at least four separate locations (map III_18a). These are field blocks 31, 87, 80 and the group of contingent field blocks, 107 and 124-126. The latter group, situated on the right bank of the central valley at the eastern foot of Prisoj was already defined as "site 8" in Appendix I. The other three clusters came to light only after the processing of the gathered finds. Situated on fields adjacent to the village, they were completely swamped by the large mass of Late Ottoman to Early Modern finds, far more visible on the surface. The one on field block 31 is situated at the northern periphery of the village, only 200 meters west of site 6. This location is particularly interesting, because apart from the small group of Late Iron Age finds there are traces of Early Iron Age activity and slightly larger quantities of fine Roman pottery. The other two concentrations are in sector IV, on the adjacent fields east of the village. These field blocks were not covered by the total grid survey, because when revisited the quantity of surface finds was disappointingly low and a considerable portion consisted of material from the past century. Nevertheless even the couple of dozens shards collected from all three field blocks give densities of nearly 1 fragment per 100 sq meters. In fact field block 80 featured an artefact density slightly greater than the density recorded on field block 107 (table 16, Appendix II)!

A thin, discontinuous carpet of this material spreads over many field blocks west of the central valley. The artifact density usually ranges between 0.5 and 5.7 fragments per 1000 sq meters. Most of this material was collected from field blocks east of the village, in sectors 4 and 7, but isolated field blocks featuring densities of over 5 shards per 1000 sq meters also appear on the fields west of the village. Interestingly in the sectors east of the valley, on fields over which the mound necropolis was built, only a couple of fragments were collected. In fact the layer of Late Iron Age material rarely crosses into the valley floor, which contributes to the fairly low overall mean density of 1.2 fragments per 1000 sq meters. The overlap between the dispersal of the Late Iron Age material and that of the Late Bronze-Early Iron Age is evident from the results of the transect survey. Even though the thin carpet of Late Iron Age finds spreads over most of the field blocks in the survey's western sector, there is a visible decline on field blocks to the north and west of the modern village, in sectors II, III and V. Only on field blocks to the east of the modern village in sectors IV and VII do we see field blocks featuring artifact densities higher than the district average. As explained earlier, the increased density on field block 31 is chiefly caused by the intensified individual transect collections. Moreover it is clear that the continuous carpet featuring between 0.5 and 5.7 fragments per 1000 sq meters becomes sparser to the west

¹¹⁸ A. Papazovska-Sanev, 19-20, 2006. Many thanks to Professor D. Mitrevski for positively identifying the survey finds.

of the dirt road connecting the villages Sopot and Vetersko. Thus for the second time in the history of habitation in the first survey area, the southern foothills of Prisoj were abandoned in favor of the eastern foothills and the western bank of the central valley.

However this observation loses its validity once we adjust the individual transect collections to 100% of the counted material (map III_18b). While the artificial character of the cluster on field block 31 is unmasked, the concentrations revealed on field units 80 and 87, 18a and 18b at the southern foot of Prisoj become more substantial, equaling or exceeding field blocks 107, 124-126 in artifact density. The implication is that apart from site 8, there were at least 3 other, equally dense or denser clusters: one on the Early Iron Age site 5a, two on previously uninhabited locations in sectors II and IV, in the lower part of the valley. The reasons for which this interpretation was rejected were elaborated in Appendix II. Most problematic of all is the fact that the counts by individual transect units grossly underestimated the true quantity of surface material on field blocks in sector VII, where site 8 is situated. This explains the high sample fraction of the collections from these units in comparison to the transect collections from field blocks surrounding the modern village.

Site 8 spreading over field blocks 104, 107, 126 and 125 doesn't stand out by the greater density of finds when compared to the clusters found on field blocks adjacent to the village. However it became immediately clear that it consisted mostly of Iron Age finds and that it spread over a much larger area. The clusters of Late Iron Age finds on field blocks 18a, 18b, 45a, 80 and 87 are either limited to the field boundaries or continue to spread on the neighboring fields in very small quantities. Even if it is assumed that they occupied most of the field blocks' area, which is very unlikely, they'll still occupy less than 3000 sq meters. In comparison, the detailed analysis of both the transect and the grid survey results show that site 8 occupies over 3.5 hectares, including the intervening overgrown stretches, but not the surrounding zones of lower artifact density. This pattern of one larger site core accompanied by several satellite clusters greatly resembles the distribution of the assemblage datable to the Late Bronze-Early Iron Age, spreading roughly over the same part of the surveyed landscape. The only obvious difference between the two assemblages is one of scale; the clusters of finds datable to the Late Iron Age are several times larger. To illustrate, the smaller satellite Late Iron Age clusters are almost as large as "site 7".

The total collections by regular grid units clarified the limits and the size of site 8 (map III_19). It is defined by artifact densities higher than 10 fragments per 100 sq meters. This zone covers most of field blocks 107 and 126 and smaller portions of field blocks 104 and 124. Thus the core of the site was not on field blocks 124-126 as suggested by the transect survey collections, but on field block 107. On the core of this site, the total grid survey recorded over 100 fragments per 100 sq meters, with a maximum density of 220 fragments per 100 sq meters. This is an almost continuous zone mostly concentrated in the southwest half of field block 107, with another smaller peak on field block 126. It is most certain that the cluster continued to spread under the overgrown stretch separating field blocks 107 and 126. To the southeast and into the valley floor ground visibility conditions precluded a total grid survey, but the individual transect collections confirmed the absence of Late Iron Age finds. To the northeast across the dirt road connecting Sopot and Vetersko, ground visibility conditions were better and we conducted total grid survey on field blocks at the southern and western foot of site 9. Although the transect collections recorded artifact density close to the mean overall value, the regular grid survey revealed only a thin, discontinuous off-site scatters giving artifact densities lower than 2 fragments per 100 sq meters. To the northeast and southwest Late Iron Age material decreases

more gradually and defining the site limits is not so straightforward. The threshold of 10 fragments per 100 sq meters was chosen because such densities rarely appear on the more distant field units in sectors III and V.

We took the total dispersal area of the Late Iron Age material to represent the impact zone of the settlement on site 8. It is possible to distinguish a narrower zone with artifact densities ranging between 8 and 10 fragments per 100 sq meters and a farther off-site zone characterized by a discontinuous carpet where artifact densities rarely exceed the overall mean value of 7.5 Late Iron Age shards per 100 sq meters. The first zone extends asymmetrically to the northeast and southwest of the site area for about 100 and 150 meters from the site edges. As we saw it cannot be followed along the shorter axis of the site area. We identified this zone with the site halo; it is analogous but far more extensive than the peripheral zone surrounding the Early Iron Age site. Unlike the latter, the Late Iron Age settlement produced a far more extensive off-site, stretching over most of the western survey sectors. The furthest isolated Late Iron Age fragments were collected from grid units west of the modern village, at a distance of over 900 meters from site 8. Such an extensive off-site carpet will only be produced during the Roman-Late Roman and the Late Ottoman-Early Modern periods. Similar but far less extensive scatters were produced by the smaller settlements on sites 7 and 11.

The total grid surveys on sites 5a-b, 6 and on field blocks 62-63 and 68 demonstrated that this farther off-site zone is not a continuous carpet of surface finds. It rather consists of ultra-thin scatters of less than 2-3 fragments per 100 sq meters separated by sterile stretches, plus small satellite clusters on which artifact density barely approached the values on the peripheral belt of site 8. Two such clusters were discovered on the settlements from the preceding Early Iron Age period, on sites 5a and 6. Although it is possible that these small clusters are slightly inflated by the inclusion of coarse pottery that belonged to the Early Iron Age assemblage, it is highly probable that there was either continued or renewed activity on these two sites. We suspect that clusters of similar size elevated the artifact densities on field blocks 80 and 87. With the means presently at our disposal, we can only speculate about the potential sources of this material. A certain portion must have originated from enclosed deposits, especially in the case of satellite clusters, such as those on sites 5a and 6 and the potential clusters on field blocks 80 and 87. In this respect the distribution pattern of the Late Iron Age material repeats the distribution of the undated assemblage. But on the other hand, it is less likely that the entire corpus of this material comes from enclosed deposits. The total dispersal area is simply too extensive and along certain sections, the finds are highly dispersed. One wonders if these are not the traces of intense manure. It is symptomatic that they are mostly limited to the most fertile stretches of land, at Prisoj's southern foot.

To sum up this interpretation of the statistical and spatial distribution of the Late Iron Age finds, it can be concluded that the main focus of occupation during this period was the narrow stretch of land between the eastern foot of Prisoj and the floor of the central valley. It is possible that there was another focus of occupation further downstream, east of the modern village, but with the exception of fields 80 and 87, there is very little evidence on the rest of the field units surrounding the area omitted from the total survey. The Late Iron Age settlement was of a much greater rank and size than all previous and later periods' settlements in this micro-region. It stretched over an area of almost 3.6 hectares, several times greater than the size of some earlier prehistoric settlements. By local standards this is a settlement of average size. It should be put in the rank of small to medium size villages, while most of the earlier settlements were of the rank of farms or hamlets. The difference in scale is also made apparent by the sheer

amount of the material and the wide dispersal area. For the first time in this region, there appears an extensive off-site zone, spreading almost continuously along the entire length of the valley's western bank. This is a thin carpet of badly worn fragments, sometimes completely disappearing, sometimes becoming slightly denser, as on fields 87 and 80. Whether resulting from certain non-residential activities or as agricultural manure, it is a clear indicator of the relative size of the local community and its mark on the surrounding landscape. A wider dispersal was also observed for some earlier assemblages, but in these cases, the carpet of off-site finds was much thinner and patchier. They were moreover mainly limited to one sector of the surveyed area, while the Late Iron Age finds spread over much of the western half of the survey. Considering the fact that there were only a very few Late Iron Age finds in the sectors east of the central valley, it becomes evident that most of the habitation activities were concentrated on the opposite west bank. However the less fertile stretches on the eastern bank were not simply excluded from the area occupied by this community. To complete the picture of the Late Iron Age landscape, one must include the extensive mound necropolis, occupying most of sector X and parts of sectors VIII and IX. Recall that the groups of mounds were mostly concentrated on the Jakupica Ridge, the eastern watershed line of the central valley and the boundary separating the areas of the modern villages Sopot and Novačani. It is a fairly imposing location and the line of mounds atop the low crest would have presented a clear message to anyone entering the area from the east. The mound necropolis marked the eastern limit of the territory claimed by the Late Iron Age community¹¹⁹. Thus during the Late Iron Age, the entire lower half of the surveyed valley was incorporated into the communal territory. Furthermore there was a clear separation between the spaces for the living and the dead, the western, more humid and fertile and the eastern, drier and less fertile bank. The settlement itself was wisely positioned in the northern corner of this triangular territory, away from the spacious, but exposed southern foothills of Prisoj, which must have been given away to cultivation. This is a relatively sheltered, withdrawn position especially when compared to that of site 5a or site 6. At the same time however, it is closer to the geometric centre of the study region, offering quick access to both banks of the central valley. Roughly the same location was occupied by an earlier settlement, datable to the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age, but the micro-locations of the two are not identical. The much larger and nucleated Late Iron Age settlement was positioned on a slightly lower and gentler terrain, closer to the valley's floor.

III.1.9 The problem of the Early Antique layer (Classical Period, 5th and 4th century BC)

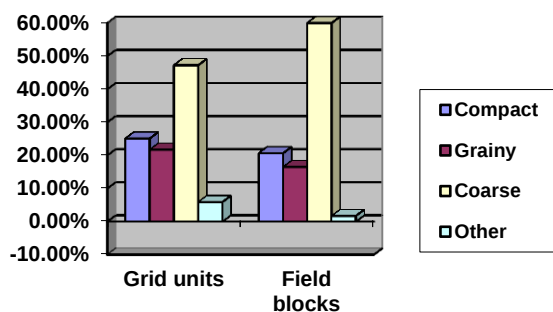
The Late Iron Age assemblage consists of a considerable number of fabric groups. Including the coarse wares, there are nearly 20 different fabric groups! A few of these fabrics consisted of a relatively small number of finds and judging by the fabric properties, they were most probably imported. But even so, the number of different fabric groups is extremely large for such a short period of time of less than two and half centuries. Assemblages from earlier, equally long or much longer time periods consisted of not more than several fabric groups. The proposed dating of this large group of fabrics is based on the prominence of certain shapes and

¹¹⁹Cf. S. E. Alcock, J. E. Rempel, 27-46, eds. P.G. Bilde, V.F. Stolba, 2006; P. Novaković, Detecting territoriality and social structure in the Bronze and Iron Ages. GIS and the hillforts in the Kras region, 101-115, ed. B. Slapšak, *On the Good Use of Geographic Information Systems in Archaeological Landscape Studies*, COST Action G2, *Ancient Landscapes and Rural Structures*, 2001.

techniques but above all, on the results of the rescue excavations on the mound necropolis. As mentioned before, these mounds were dated not earlier than the late 8th and not later than the end of the 6th century BC. The small number of diagnostic or decorated shards have close parallels among the material from other sites dated to this period and can hardly be dated earlier or later than the Late Iron Age. Nevertheless it is difficult to accept that such a variety of fabrics was produced within the suggested chronological frame.

It is somewhat problematic to group all these fabrics into wider categories, because the differences between two fabric classes are often very subtle. But focusing on certain fabric properties, such as surface treatment, firing and texture of the paste, it is possible to distinguish between two very general categories of plain fabrics. The first, possibly earlier group is characterized by a deep spatula polish, compact but brittle paste and uneven firing. The second, possibly later group, lacks the characteristic deep surface polish, has a more granular texture, while firing is generally more even. The fragments of this group of fabrics have slipped and superficially smoothed surfaces. Although the suggested differences are not always clear, they aren't insignificant and it is quite possible that they truly reflect chronological differences. Unfortunately the two groups of fabrics are completely overlapping and spread over most of the site area, the presumed later group being only slightly more confined and slightly less numerous (map III_20). It never appears north of the site limits and it is mostly confined to the fields east of the modern village. If this suggests a possible contraction of the settlement during a later phase, it was of a rather small scale. Nearly the same amount of finds can be classed into either groups of fabrics or more precisely, 1 239 in the group of granular, slipped fabrics and 1434 in the presumably earlier group of polished and compact fabrics. The size of the settlement didn't change significantly, although the total dispersal area evidently shrank, as examples of the granular slipped fabrics rarely appear on the fields west of the village.

Graph III_1: Distribution of the Late Iron Age assemblage by fabrics



It is another question if the presumed later phase actually represents the Early Antique period or if it simply marks the later part of the Late Iron Age production. One of the more characteristic pottery types, known from excavations on a number of 5th and 4th century sites in the country is Black Gloss ware¹²⁰. Only a few black gloss examples were found in the survey area, all collected from the central sections of “site 8” and it is equally possible that these too date to the late 6th century BC. Another type of pottery characteristic for this period is Gray

¹²⁰D. Vučković-Todorović, *Antička Demir Kapija*, 229-267, *Starinar* XII, 1961; I. Mikulčić, *Iliro-Arhajski grobovi is okoline Štipa 197-209*, *Starinar* XIII-XIV, 1965; V. Sokolovska, *Isar Marvinci i Povardarieto vo Antičko vreme*, Skopje 1986; Rescue excavation in 2009 on the latter site unearthed considerable amounts of Late Archaic and Classical black gloss pottery, most probably locally produced.

Paionian ware, deeply rooted in the local, prehistoric traditions. On larger sites gray-fired pottery imitating shapes from Greece and the Aegean have been attested in 6th century layers¹²¹. Although present in respectable amounts on the Late Iron Age site, the gray-fired fabrics exhibited typically Iron Age features, such as deep surface polish and incised or notched decoration. The fabrics classed into the granular, slipped group almost never exhibit features that can be particularly related to the Early Antique Period. As with the Gray Paionian group, there lack the typical Classical shapes and techniques. Most of the diagnostic fragments featured shapes characteristic for the local prehistoric traditions. Examples of strap handles are an exception, but these have been attested in 6th century deposits during the excavation of the mound necropolis. Thus there is in general very little positive evidence of occupation after the end of the 6th century BC on site 8.

The principle problem with the collected material is the long persistence of certain shapes and techniques that were probably already well-established in the local Iron Age production¹²². Pottery made of the same or very similar raw material appears alongside typical Late Roman tile featuring only very subtle changes in the shapes and production techniques. As will be shown, fabrics datable to the Hellenistic Period are also unrelated to the wares known from excavations on larger sites. In regards to this, one should allow the possibility that occupation on site 8 continued into the 5th and 4th century BC. At the moment it is impossible to arrive at a non-arbitrary conclusion. It is noteworthy to mention that research in the past several decades has shown that, although many aspects of material culture have changed, life continued on most of the known Iron Age settlements after 500 BC, particularly in the middle and upper stretches of the Vardar Valley. It is in any case certain that by the late 4th century BC at latest, there was another dramatic shift in the settlement history of the survey area. What remains unclear is whether site 8 and the entire micro-region were completely abandoned by around 500 BC or sometime during the ensuing period of Early Antiquity. The later Hellenistic settlement was of a very different scale and seemingly shows little respect for the Late Iron Age landscape.

III.1.10 The Hellenistic Period (late 4th – late 1st century BC, table 17-18, graph 10, Appendix II)

According to the survey results, the studied micro-region experienced dramatic cultural and demographic changes by the beginning of the Hellenistic Period, if not earlier. The amount of finds datable to the Hellenistic Period is sharply reduced and they feature a very different distribution pattern. Although many characteristics of the local pottery production survive, the differences with the Late Iron Age material are more than apparent. Actually one can confidently argue that there was an obvious decline in the overall quality of pottery production. Certain techniques for example, such as fully reduced firing are almost completely forgotten, while firing and surface treatment is much humbler. In total only about 225 fragments can be broadly dated to the Hellenistic Period or 1.35% of the total collection. Apart from the Bronze Age, this is the smallest of the assemblages discussed so far. It is at least several times less numerous than the much earlier prehistoric assemblages, indicating drastic decline of settlement and population.

¹²¹ V. Sokolovska, 40-54, 80, 1986; for the “phenomenon” of local gray-fired pottery, V. Stojanović-Anderson, *Stobi, the Hellenistic and Roman Pottery* 14-18, Princeton 1992.

¹²² M. Šurbanovska et al. Arheološki istraživanja-Stobi 2001, 271-282, *Macedonia Acta Arhaeologica*. 18, 2008.

Assuming that survival rate diminishes with the passage of time, this dwindling of the quantity of Hellenistic finds becomes even more significant.

But despite the small size of the collection, the Hellenistic material is spread over a considerable area (table 17, Appendix II). According to the field block survey, it occupies a number of field blocks in the central parts of the Ramnište Ridge and along the left bank of the central valley. It even partly spreads into sector X, on the neighbouring Jakupica Ridge (map III_21a). Moreover the transect survey collections indicate a relatively even distribution. On at least seven field units the artifact density is at least twice as high as the mean district value of 2 fragments per 1000 sq meters (table 18, Appendix II). The highest density of 6.5 fragments recorded on field block 167 is not much higher than the densities recorded on field blocks 164 and 188 with 5.3 and 5.7 fragments per 1000 sq meters. Thus the collections by individual field walking transects point to at least three potential clusters: on field blocks 167-168, but also on field blocks 186a-188 and 163-164.

At a first sight, not much is changed when the number of finds collected by individual transect units is adjusted to represent 100% of the counted material (map III_21b). However two of the concentrations of Hellenistic material not only retain their integrity, but also feature artifact densities much higher than the rest of the field units with Hellenistic finds. On field blocks 167 and 188, the artifact density could increase to over 17 and nearly 25 fragments per 1000 sq meters, between 4 and 5 times the mean district value. On the rest of the field units, especially along the crest of the Ramnište Ridge, the artifact density rarely exceeds 5 fragments per 1000 sq meters. There is a somewhat more substantial increase in sector VI, along the left bank of the creek, but note the fairly small size of these field units. Field blocks 186a-b and 184 feature between 7 and 8 fragments per 1000 sq meters, considerably higher than the district average. Whether analyzing the adjusted or the raw records of the collections by individual transect units, the Hellenistic assemblage is characterized by a fairly contracted zone of lower than average artifact density. It was documented on field blocks along the eastern and northern periphery of the area over which this material is dispersed. Obviously the focus was on the crest of the ridge, in its central part and on the valley's floor.

Unfortunately only after the processing of the collected material did we become aware of this distribution pattern. Prior to the study of the material, only field blocks 167-168 stood apart by the higher overall artifact density and the grid survey was limited to these field units. The total collections covering most of field block 167 and the southwest quarter of field block 168 confirmed the existence of a larger cluster dating to the Hellenistic Period (map III_24). It was situated in the central part of field block 167, possibly continuing for a short distance to the south. This was a compact cluster measuring at least 2000 sq meters, but if we consider only the zone featuring over 2 fragments per 100 sq meters, the occupied area will shrink to about 1800 sq meters. The cluster consisted of two cores featuring artifact densities of over 20 fragments per 100 sq meters. One was situated in the central part of the grid, the other on its southern edge, partly cut by an artificial terrace. They are surrounded by a narrow belt of artifact densities lower than the district average of 1.5-2 fragments per 100 sq meters of total grid survey. This peripheral belt wasn't revealed in its entirety, though it certainly spread for a distance of 10 to 20 meters from the site edge, mostly to the north and east.

It seems as if the distribution of the Hellenistic material is a mirror-image of the distribution pattern of the possible Late Neolithic assemblage. It too consists of one central cluster and at least three smaller, satellite clusters. As already concluded, the Hellenistic assemblage is slightly less concentrated and less numerous. The main focus of occupation

spreads over an area of 1800 sq meters, excluding the peripheral zone and the possibility that it extended slightly further to the south. Clearly this settlement was of the rank of a farm indicating a strong demographic decline from the period of the Late Iron Age. In fact site 12 is smaller even in comparison to some of the earlier prehistoric settlements.

There remains however the difficulty of interpreting the “satellite” clusters. The main issue is whether they represent residual remains of clusters of similar size to that of site 12 or if these are traces of less intensive non-residential activities, such as dispersed burials, field-sheds, rubbish pits, votive deposits or traces of ancient manure. If the former case was true, it would imply that the Hellenistic settlement was at least two or three times larger, approaching the size of the earlier prehistoric settlements. Judging solely by the results of the transect survey this is absolutely plausible. At the same time, it has to be stressed that on most of the field units where the satellite clusters of Hellenistic material were found, the visibility conditions and the recent history of land-use were similar to that on field block 167. Even after compensating for the worse visibility conditions on some of the field blocks and the lesser degree of survey intensity, the density of Hellenistic finds on these clusters would barely equal the artifact density on the periphery of site 12. This was to a certain degree confirmed on similarly dispersed assemblages in the western survey sectors, such as the LBA-EIA or the Late Iron Age assemblage. In these cases, total grid survey was carried out on both the central and the satellite clusters and the results clearly confirmed that the satellite clusters are indeed much smaller. This supports the initial interpretation that during the Hellenistic Period settlement in the surveyed basin consisted of one central focus and a number of satellite clusters or an extensive and discontinuous off-site carpet marking the community’s impact territory or the settlement area, a zone where apart from residential, agricultural, industrial, sepulchral and other practices took place. However it is exactly at this point that we run into a considerable problem: if the total dispersal area marks the communities’ inner territories, then how to explain the fact that the many times larger site 11 produced an impact zone of roughly equal size to that of the Hellenistic farmstead? It is mainly because of this reason that we remain doubtful about the completeness of the map of Hellenistic clusters in the survey area. It is possible that there existed at least one other residential site on field blocks 163-164 or on the valley floor, on field blocks 186a-188. It is certain that these potential clusters weren’t larger than the cluster on site 12. In this respect the Hellenistic settlement is much more similar to the dispersed Late Bronze-Early Iron Age settlement on the opposite bank of the central valley. Note that in both cases the “central” clusters measured less than 2000 sq meters. The quantity and the quality of the finds on these locations indicate that these were truly larger clusters, perhaps representing the foci of dispersed settlements.

Even accepting the possibility that the settlement on site 12 was accompanied by a few other residential sites, it can hardly challenge the observation that there was a serious population decline during this period. The Late Iron Age village on site 8 was abandoned and replaced by an individual or a small group of farmsteads. Apart from the great demographic reversal, the Hellenistic Period brings about another, no less significant change in the local settlement history. After a longer period of continuous occupation of the western bank, the new Hellenistic settlement moved to the opposite eastern bank. There are no securely identified Hellenistic finds in sectors west of the central valley. Like most of the previously discussed assemblages, they are completely confined to a single micro-topographic unit, in this case the Ramnište Ridge and the lower terraces on the valley’s left bank. As explained in the previous chapter, this part of the studied micro-region is drier and less fertile. In most periods of the past, the main focus of occupation was on the higher western bank, covered with Quaternary deposits and richer in

freshwater springs. The choice to settle on the eastern bank, entirely covered with Neogene deposits is understandable for the Middle-Neolithic settlement. It is in accord with the known settlement pattern during this period and the preference for the lighter Neogene soils can be explained bearing in mind that they're easier to cultivate. Moreover the Mid-Neolithic settlement and its successor on site 11 occupied the tip of the Ramnište Ridge, which represents the centre of the surveyed basin and offers a ready access to the floor of the valley. But it is somewhat more difficult to understand the perspective of the Hellenistic community. Focused around site 12 and the central portions of the Ramnište Ridge, it occupied a peripheral part of this micro-region, hundreds of meters away from the main natural artery and the most fertile stretches of land. This is an open unprotected location, lacking any topographic integrity. The only protection it offered is its relatively withdrawn position.

Judging by the appearance of certain fabric groups, occupation on site 12 continued into the Roman Period. With such a low chronological resolution, it is impossible to know if this small settlement existed continuously or if it was abandoned sometime during the Hellenistic Period and briefly reoccupied in Roman times. Noteworthy is the similarity between the predominant plain fabrics of the two periods.

III.1.11 The Roman to Late Roman Period (AD 1st-end of 6th century, tables 19-27, graphs 12-21, Appendix II)

Regarding local pottery production, the transition from the Hellenistic to the Roman Period is known from the excavations on larger urban centers, such as Stobi or Heraclea Lyncestis¹²³. It is unfortunate that nearly nothing has been published on the subject of pottery from the Early and Middle Imperial periods since the publication of Stojanović-Anderson's study of the Stobi material. In the meantime more pre-4th century finds have been unearthed from Stobi, Heraclea Lyncestis and other urban centres in the south, but also from Scupi where small parts of the Early and Mid-Imperial colony are finally coming to light¹²⁴. However local pottery production in the survey area rarely followed the more recognizable Roman shapes and decorative techniques. In fact in many aspects it follows the local traditions established during the Iron Age. There were only a few close parallels with the material from Stobi or Scupi, mostly Late Roman examples. Often the only indicator that one is dealing with material from the Roman Period was the accompanying material, primarily brick and tile. In the southern half of the Republic of Macedonia, architectural ceramics appear already in the Early Hellenistic Period, but they are attested mostly on larger urban centers. Only in the Roman Period do they become widespread, often being by far the most predominant type of surface find¹²⁵. Hence brick and tile were a very useful chronological indicator and greatly helped in the dating of certain fabric groups.

¹²³ V. Stojanović-Anderson 1992; E. Maneva, *Nekolku tipovi i formi na Elinistička i Rimska keramika od Herakleja*, Bitola 1979; M. Šurbanovska, *Rimska keramika od Stobi 151-162*, *Macedonia Acta Arhaeologica* 17, 2006.

¹²⁴ J. Wiseman, et al. 1973, 1975, 1979; I. Mikulčić, *Stobi, an ancient city*, Skopje 2003; E. Nikolova, *Stobi-zapadna nekropola 247-270*, *Macedonia Acta Arhaeologica* 18, 2008, M. Šurbanovska et al. 271-282, 2008; L. Didrova, *Heraclea Lyncestis; problem na hronologija i interpretacija 269-291*, *Macedonia Acta Arhaeologica* 15, 1999; L. Jovanova, *Skupi-Colonia Flavia Scupinorum: topografija i urbanisticka struktura na gradot od I do III vek 197-222*, *Macedonia Acta Arhaeologica* 18, 2008.

¹²⁵ V. Lilčić, *Antička gradežna keramika vo R. Makedonija*, Skopje 1996.

In local production more recognizable shapes and decorations begin to take hold during the Late Roman Period. In fact most of the Roman fabric groups are dated between the 4th and the 6th centuries AD. Excluding the coarse fabrics, which were only broadly dated to the Roman Period, only a few fabric groups can be dated earlier than the 4th century. But this could quite possibly reflect the fact that Late Roman pottery is more recognizable than plain pottery from the Early and Mid-Imperial phases¹²⁶.

As the majority of Roman fabrics from the first survey lack horizontal stratigraphy, it was found impossible to define a separate Early to Mid-Imperial assemblage. Only on one or two site locations did the more recognizable Late Roman fabrics appear unaccompanied by other fabric groups broadly datable to the Roman Period. Needless to say the coarse wares are particularly troublesome in this respect, for they hardly change even when compared to later prehistoric periods. Similarly there lacks even a most basic chronology for the architectural ceramics. Perhaps it is not chronologically insignificant that the various fabric groups of brick and tile exhibit a clear horizontal stratigraphy. Unfortunately the pottery fabrics don't necessarily follow the divergent distribution patterns of the architectural ceramics. It is nevertheless apparent that almost all of the architectural ceramics are accompanied by Late Roman material. Given the circumstances, the Roman material was grouped in two chronological classes: a very broad category of Roman material datable anywhere between the 1st and late 6th century AD and a narrower category of Late Roman material datable between the 4th and the 6th centuries. The latter group includes fabric categories that can be dated through direct parallels with known Late Roman material, while the rest of the fine fabrics and all coarse fabrics were grouped into the broader class of Roman finds. Again the greater portion of the coarse fabric groups is almost certainly Late Roman. In fact only three fabric groups exhibit a consistently divergent distribution pattern from the Late Roman finds and only for two of these was it possible to find some parallels among material from excavated Mid-Late Roman deposits.

As a result of this crude chronology, at least two highly important problems of the local settlement history remain unresolved. Firstly, it remains unclear if life continued uninterrupted after the Roman conquest. The earlier Hellenistic settlement was clearly occupied sometime during the Roman Period, but it'll remain uncertain if the site was reoccupied or continued its existence after the Roman conquest. The second issue remaining unanswered due to the poor understanding of the chronology of the finds is the settlement and population dynamics during the various phases of the Roman Period. In this respect it is important to bear in mind that even if there is a more substantial Early Imperial layer, it will be diminished by the super-imposed and more recognizable Late Roman phase.

A total of about 1450 fragments can be dated both to the Roman and the Late Roman Period. This is the third most numerous chronological group in the survey area, after the Late Ottoman and Early Modern and the Late Iron Age material. It represents about 8.75% of the total collection. However when comparing the amounts of Roman and the material from earlier periods, a number of additional factors need to be considered. The Roman Period lasted two to three times longer than the Hellenistic Period or the two phases of the Iron Age. If one counts only the finds that can be strictly dated to the Late Roman Period, their sum will barely exceed 1000, only slightly greater than the amount of material dated to some of the prehistoric periods. There is also the factor of decreasing survival rate of the surface finds with the passage of time¹²⁷. Being at least half a millennium later than the prehistoric periods, the material from the

¹²⁶ Cf. D.K. Pettegrew, *The Busy Countryside of Late Roman Corinth, 743-784*, *Hesperia* 76, 2007.

¹²⁷ J. Bintliff, P. Howard, A. Snodgrass 146-147, 1999; E. Neustupný 51-57, 1998.

Roman Period should have better chances of survival in the surface record and even obscure the presence of earlier layers. Finally one has to bear in mind that around 700 or nearly 50% of all Roman finds comprised brick and tile. This was a novelty in the local material culture, mainly introduced during the Roman Period. The architectural remains of earlier periods including the Hellenistic, almost never survive in the surface record. Thus the number of Roman finds is not only increased due to the temporal factor, but also because of the more monumental character of the material culture during this period. Put in simpler terms, more goods of fairly imperishable materials were being produced during the Roman Period. A Roman structure, even if only partly built of firm materials would predictably produce a larger surface cluster than a prehistoric dwelling made of wood and mud. Now, if the architectural ceramics are excluded from the Roman assemblage, though in certain circumstances it is possible to argue that the tile actually conceals the pottery finds, the quantity of all Roman finds will actually equal the quantity of the Middle Neolithic or the Early Iron Age assemblage. Further in the text, while discussing the relations between Roman and earlier material on multi-period sites, we'll reveal another indicator of the actual sparseness of the Roman material in this survey area. For the moment, we can only comment on the very modest range between the minimum and maximum on-site density recorded by total grid survey (table 19, appendix II). The maximum on-site density of only 20 fragments per 100 sq meters is strikingly low. In fact it stands higher only to the densities recorded on the vestigial Bronze and Late Bronze Age sites! It is difficult to attribute this fact to the slightly unfavorable ground visibility conditions on site 5a at the time of the total grid collections, because we'll see that these low on-site densities appear persistently on all Roman sites in this survey area. Understandably this small difference between the densities on the site core and periphery complicated the definition of site limits, especially when clusters of intermediary densities were involved.

Despite their relative sparseness, the finds datable to the Roman Period are among the most widespread class of finds in the first survey area. In contrast to the assemblages dating to earlier periods, this material was found virtually in every survey sector. Because of the large total area of dispersal, instead of analyzing the transect survey results block by block we grouped them into three basic zones of various artifact density (map III_25a). Of the 104 field units on which the transect survey recorded Roman material, about 80 featured artifact densities lower than the mean overall value of 3.45 fragments per 1000 sq meters. They are found dispersed across the entire survey area with a tendency of clustering around field blocks featuring higher artifact density. Depending on their micro-locations and the character of the collected finds, they were interpreted as the remains of the off-site or in some cases, site halos. The second zone featuring artifact densities higher than the mean overall value, but lower than 39 fragments per 1000 sq meters comprises about 20% of all field blocks with Roman material. They appear isolated or in pairs in most survey sectors, but they are particularly concentrated in sectors west of the village, near the monastic complex and on the easternmost survey sector, in the area of the Late Iron Age mound necropolis. Here it is useful to make a further distinction between field blocks featuring between 3.5 and 7 fragments per 1000 sq meters and those featuring over 10 fragments per 1000 sq meters. The latter group is characterized by artifact densities at least 3 times the overall mean value and approach the minimum on-site densities recorded by the grid surveys (tables 20-21, Appendix II). Only 4 field blocks feature artifact densities higher than 40 fragments per 1000 sq meters, but it has to be noted that in these cases the increased density could very well result from the small size of the field units (field blocks 4a, 4b in sector I) or the more thorough individual transect collections (field block 31). The fact that they appear

alongside or close to field blocks belonging to the second zone deepens the overall distribution pattern of Roman material as revealed by the transect survey. Considering only the field blocks with densities higher than 10 fragments per 1000 sq meters as potential site locations, there is a clear concentration of activity in the peripheral parts of the basins: on field blocks in the central part of sector I at the foot of the fort “Kale”, Sopot, on field blocks 44-45 in the northwest corner of the survey, but also on the terraces southwest of the modern village and finally, on the pair of field blocks 133-134 and 142-143 along the survey’s eastern limit. The central portions of the basin are conspicuously vacant. This was rarely the case in earlier periods and it could be related to profound changes in the local settlement pattern and agrarian relations.

We saw however that the records of the individual transect collection need adjustments, if we are to compare the artifact density on field blocks across various survey sectors. This is especially necessary for the Roman to Late Roman assemblage, where on a few field blocks, individual transects collections amounted to total collections from larger units or were repeated in more than one occasion. If we assume that they were limited to the number of finds counted during the quantification campaign, we’ll end up with a density map that is visibly modified (map III_25b). On certain field units in the western survey half, there is a considerable increase in the density of Roman to Late Roman material, while on others, including the clusters of field blocks in the easternmost sector, it declines below the overall average. The range between the minimum and the maximum density increases considerably and it becomes necessary to introduce separate mean density values for each survey sector. The concentrations on field blocks in sectors VII and X become invisible if the overall density is compared and Roman material becomes visibly concentrated on the field blocks in sectors I through III. What this analysis confirms is that the clusters on field blocks 133-134 and 142a/b-143 in sector X are thinner and also probably smaller than the clusters by the monastic complex or the northwest corner of the survey area (graph 11, Appendix II).

Although we lack definitive evidence, it is nearly certain that the network of potential Roman sites was at least partly contemporary with the three fortifications built at the corners of the surveyed basin. The one above the monastic complex known in the literature as “Kale”, Sopot has been published some decades ago and dated to the Roman Period with a possible prehistoric phase¹²⁸. The other two labeled site 9 and 10 were discussed in Appendix I. The few finds found on the barren surfaces were identified as Late Roman tiles and a similar date was suggested by the masonry and the layout. It is noteworthy that each of the field blocks featuring higher density of Roman material is positioned in the immediate vicinity of some of the forts. Only at the foot of site 9 did there lack evidence for occupation during the Roman Period, although even here, the density of Roman finds was slightly above the overall mean value.

The detailed sector by sector analysis of the transect survey results and the total grid surveys on some of the field units with artifact densities higher than the survey’s average largely confirmed these preliminary observations. A few unperceived but important details came to light, but in general the existence of genuine sites was confirmed on most field blocks featuring artifact densities at least 2 to 3 times the mean overall values recorded by the transect survey. But at the same time, we regretted the fact that some of the potential sites were left out of the total grid survey. It has to be recalled that at the time of the total grid survey we had no idea about the chronological composition of the finds and we were chiefly guided by the overall artifact densities. As a result some field blocks in the eastern survey periphery, where the off-site carpet

¹²⁸ I. Mikulčić, 99-100, 1982; as mentioned, it is very probable that the ceramic finds that suggested a prehistoric phase on this site were in fact examples of the local conservative production during the Roman Period.

dating to the last couple of centuries became sparser escaped closer scrutiny. This inevitably creates the familiar problem of defining the rank, size and character of the potential sites that weren't documented by the regular grid survey. As we saw, the lack of detailed data can only partly be compensated for with the resolution of the transect survey records.

The presence of Roman material in sector I was recognized early in the fieldwork process, thanks to the larger quantities of brick and tile on the meadows to the east of the monastic complex, on field blocks 4a and 4b (map III_26b). The location was defined as "site 2" in Appendix I on the basis of the high overall artifact density. The study of the material showed that the great majority of the finds on this location are Late Roman. Indeed these field blocks feature the highest density of Roman material in the survey area of over 6 fragments per 100 sq meters of transect survey. However we remained reserved about the original location of this material pointing to the possible dislocations from "Kale", Sopot, as well as from the monastic complex built in the early decades of the 20th century. The total collections on grid 16a-b and the analysis of the individual transect collections showed that Roman material spread over most field blocks in sector I, with an evident concentration on field blocks 3-5 covering the monastic yard and the surrounding field blocks. There is a gradual decrease towards the northwest and southeast extremes of the sector. Thus it is very unlikely that this extensive scatter was eroded from the hill-fort above the monastery, although local dislocations (such as piling up larger fragments along the edges of the fields) are not improbable¹²⁹.

The total collections on grids 16a-b revealed an absence of clear patterning (map III_26a). Rather there were a few small "cores" featuring between 8 and 12 fragments per 100 sq meters, not much higher than the density recorded by the transect survey. Two such "cores" limited to single grid units were discovered on field block 4a and on a pair of grid units in the monastic yard, near the Bronze Age site. They are surrounded by a fairly continuous carpet with artifact densities ranging between 2 and 6 Roman fragments per 100 sq meters. As the analysis of the adjusted transect collections shows, this layer certainly spread over the yard of the monastery, over field blocks 3, 5a-b and possibly, over part of field block 6, on the other side of the seasonal creek (cf. map III_26b and 26c). Although indicated by the transect survey results, the total grid survey failed to detect even a roughly concentric pattern of distribution. As a consequence it is difficult to offer a rough estimate of the size of these scatters. They could spread over an area of almost two hectares, but considering the fact that individual clusters are rarely larger than 200 sq meters, the extent of the total dispersal area is hardly a useful indicator.

Judging by the predominantly multi-focal and discontinuous distribution pattern, but also by the character of the finds (mostly tile and plain pottery with little coarse ware, graph 13 in Appendix II), these could be the remains of a small communal necropolis. This is chiefly supported by the two inscribed tomb-stones, either found in the monastic yard or brought from the nearby fields. It remains unclear if this necropolis belonged to the inhabitants of the small fortification on the top of the cliff or to a hypothetical open settlement situated on the opposite bank of the Vardar¹³⁰. The difficulty of accepting the necropolis thesis is that the Roman Period isn't known to feature ceramic assemblages with a specifically sepulchral character or function. Alternatively these could be the remains of a residential site, a "suburb" of "Kale", Sopot; the lack of a compact and dense surface cluster resulting from recent disturbances inflicted during

¹²⁹ This phenomenon was also encountered in sector III and in the second survey area, cf. B. Slapšak, 145-149, eds. J. Chapman et al. 1988.

¹³⁰ One of the tomb-stones has been summarily published, N. Vulić, *Antički spomenici naše zemlje, Spomenik Srpske Kraljevske Akademije* LXXI, Belgrade 1931.

the construction of the monastery. But as explained in the previous chapter and in the section discussing the remains of the Bronze Age, there is very little arable land in sector I and the location is isolated from the fields at Prisoj's foot. If this was a more substantial settlement quarter, it must have exploited the fields on the opposite bank of the Vardar.

Unlike with the scattered and disturbed remains in sector I, there were no doubts about the character of the clusters on field blocks 44-44a and 45-45a. It immediately became clear that these were site locations and they were defined as sites 5a and 5b in Appendix I. These field units stood out by the quantity of Roman finds, even though individual transect collections were less thorough than on the rest of the field blocks. The great majority of Roman material in the survey area came from the total grid collections on sites 5a and 5b.

Site 5a is most probably the largest Roman settlement in the first survey area (map III_27a). The cluster revealed by the total grid survey measured at least 8000 sq meters and probably spread over the neighbouring field blocks to the east, on field blocks 41 and 42. On these field units we were not allowed to carry out individual transect collections, though the overall artifact density suggests that even if site 5a did extend over field blocks 41-42, it was only for a short distance. In all likelihood these field blocks hide the site halo, the zone featuring between 2 and 4 fragments per 100 sq meters. Only on the south side on field block 44a did we manage to reveal a larger portion of the site halo using regular grid units. It probably spread for over 80 meters from the southern edge of the site occupying the entire area of field block 44a. Along the northern and western limits, it is impossible to observe a transitional zone. Artifact densities ranging between 6 and 12.6 fragments per 100 sq meters were recorded across the entire width of field block 44 and the northern half of field block 44a. It is possible that site 5a produced a halo to the north on field block 40; but as this field was occupied by the cemetery of the modern village and ground visibility was very low, it was decided to limit the total grid survey to field blocks 44 and 44a. To the west site 5a is delimited by a steep ravine.

The extent of the halo of site 5a can roughly be determined on the basis of the individual transect collections. Except on field blocks 41-43, east of the site, where we were only allowed to count surface artifacts, site 5a is surrounded with field blocks featuring average artifact density (map III_25a). On the east, after the artificial gap on field blocks 41-43, Roman material reappears in small quantities on field blocks 31, 33 and 34, about 180 meters measured from the site's eastern edge. A modest amount was also collected from the village cemetery, covered by field block 40, while to the west on field blocks 45-45b, artifact density returns to an on-site level. This pattern is only reinforced when the transect collections are adjusted to represent 100% of the material counted (map III_27b). The adjusted collections by individual transect units also suggest an increased density on field blocks in sector II, south of the site. Some of these, for example field blocks 20 or 72b are situated over 200 meters from the site's southern edge. But as shown in Appendix II, this is not a carpet that spreads continuously from the site's southern edge, while the finds from sector II, although datable to the Roman Period clearly stand apart from the predominant fabric classes on site 5a.

Although the maximal artifact density on this site is not much higher than the densities recorded on "site 2" in sector I, densities higher than 6 shards per 100 sq meters are continuously spread over an area many times larger than the tiny clusters in sector I. Site 5a is a large and compact cluster with one major and one minor core in the western half of the site area. The finds collected by individual transect and regular grids constitute a full domestic assemblage including architectural ceramics, kitchen ware, storage jars and plain table ware, but only a few fragments of fine ware (graph 13, Appendix II). One of the more characteristic classes of finds from this

site was a large group of amorphous chunks of coarse ceramics, featuring very large quantities of poorly sorted volcanic rock. The size of these fragments as well as the occurrence of fine, funnel-shaped imprints on some examples suggest an architectural function, probably daub. Looking at the on-site distribution pattern and especially the distribution of architectural ceramics, it was concluded that this was a nucleated settlement ranking as a small hamlet (map III_28).

The importance of the micro-location occupied by site 5a was explained in Appendix 1 and in the section discussing the distribution of Early Iron Age finds. If there are truly remains of a residential quarter in sector I near the monastic complex, it occupied a far less favourable location than the settlement on site 5a.

The individual transect collections clearly indicated that this material spread over to field blocks 45, 45a and 45b, on the western side of the ravine. However the total grid survey revealed a rather contracted and discontinuous cluster and total collections were limited to field block 45 and parts of field block 45a (maps III_27a, 28). More precisely there were two separate clusters. One larger in the eastern half of the grid measured about 1200 sq meters, the other smaller and certainly disturbed in the western end of the grid, at the border between field blocks 45 and 45a. The more extensive core in the eastern half featured a maximum artifact density of about 10 fragments per 100 sq meters, while the smaller western core was far denser. On one grid unit we counted over 70 fragments of tile, but as explained in the appendices, this is certainly the result of recent dislocation. Originally this western core was probably larger but thinner. The two clusters are bounded together by a zone of 2 to 3 fragments per 100 sq meters characteristic for the halo zone to the south of site 5a.

The material collected from site 5b is identical to that collected from its larger neighbour. The finds constitute a full domestic assemblage, although there are differences in the presence of certain basic categories. There is a larger amount of tile and less coarse ware, but it is evidently different from the assemblage from sector I consisting almost exclusively of architectural ceramics and only rare fragments of plain, domestic fabrics (graph 13, Appendix I).

It remains unclear if “site 5b” was a continuation of the larger settlement on the eastern side of the ravine or traces of other non-residential activities. A very similar pattern can be seen in the modern landscape, with animal sheds and the village cemetery situated a few hundred meters from the village, on the less fertile stretches to the west. Sites 5a and 5b occupy twin locations, the smaller site occupying the less favorable and more isolated location. The two appear as an almost exact replica of the modern village and cemetery. The difficulty of accepting this interpretation rests primarily in the high artifact density and the character of the material collected from “site 5b”. Concerning both aspects this cluster differs little from its larger neighbour on the other side of the ravine. And yet if it was a continuation of the settlement on site 5a, its positioning is rather inconvenient. The deep ravine that separates the two sites prevents direct communication between the main cluster and its satellite.

The majority of the finds on sites 5a and 5b can be dated to the Late Roman Period. However it is possible that both locations were occupied prior to the 4th century AD. Fragments of a locally produced fabric group characterized by fully oxidized firing and plain surfaces (the so called soft-orange fabric group) were discovered on both sites, usually following the distribution of the predominant Late Roman fabrics (map III_30). As discussed in appendix II, the distribution of this material and its similarities to the material excavated from Early and Middle Imperial layers point to a possible earlier date, although it is equally possible that we are dealing with a fabric group produced over a longer period of time. Either way an earlier, pre-

4th century phase on site 5a shouldn't be excluded. Unfortunately it wasn't possible to define a separate Early to Mid-Imperial assemblage and the exact extent of this phase remains unknown.

The second largest concentration of the soft-orange fabric came from the intensified transect collections on field block 31, on the very edge of the halo zone, 170 meters east of site 5a. Here this material was found accompanied by equally large or larger quantities of other fabric groups with a possible pre-4th century date and a handful of examples of the local Late Roman fabrics that predominate in the collections from site 5a-5b. The entire collection of Roman material on field block 31 gave an artifact density of almost 4 fragments per 100 sq meters. This equals the artifact densities recorded on the periphery of site 5a-5b; because the individual transect collections were more thorough, there is no compensation for the lesser survey intensity on field block 31. The analysis showed that in case the individual transect collections were limited to the number of finds counted, field block 31 wouldn't differ from other field blocks surrounding site 5a-5b, encompassing its halo.

The composition of the collection as well as the character of the finds also indicates that this cluster doesn't represent the remains of a residential site. There is little coarse pottery and more significantly, architectural ceramics is nearly absent. Moreover nearly 50% of the finds collected from this field were fragments of fine pottery that wasn't produced locally. The examples of fine red-slipped pottery or a peculiar soft-buff ware decorated with grayish wash have no parallels among the predominant local fabrics on site 5a-5b, but show great similarity to the material excavated from Early and Mid-Imperial deposits in larger urban centres. It should be noted that most of these finds were relatively well preserved, especially in comparison to the material from site 5a-5b. This circumstance suggests that they came from recently disturbed, enclosed deposits. Field block 31 also yielded a pair of perfectly preserved pyramidal loom-weights. They were made in the local Late Roman fabric indicating a continued presence on this site throughout the Roman Period. It should be stressed that loom-weights are frequently found on Roman necropoleis.

This unusual concentration of fine pottery isn't limited exclusively to field block 31. At least three smaller clusters were collected from field blocks and grid units in sector II, west of the modern village (map III_25a). Adjusting the transect collections to represent 100% of the material counted, these field blocks are ranked among the highest in the survey area in terms of artifact density (map III_27b). As pointed out in Appendix II, the high values predicted for field blocks in sector I and II are to a large degree inflated by the more accurate pottery counts, coupled by the low ground visibility on these fields. In addition on certain field blocks the high artifact density was greatly enhanced by the small size of the field unit. The detailed analysis showed that the maximum density barely exceeds the overall mean value and it is lower than the threshold of 2-3 fragments per 100 sq meters (table 22, Appendix II). The average density recorded by the grid survey for this sector is far below the densities recorded in sectors I and III. These are in practice tiny clusters of surface material consisting of between a pair and a few fragments dispersed on field blocks 16a, 20, 72 and on a couple of units on grids 2 and 4. Not a single fragment came from grid 1, although it is situated closer to site 5a-5b (III_maps 28, 30). Thus these clusters appear only after an intervening sterile stretch. As on field block 31, they consist almost exclusively of fragments of fine table ware, in all likelihood imported from some larger centre. Among the dozen collected examples it was possible to recognize fragments of jugs, table jars and a nicely preserved lid. Coarse fabrics and architectural ceramics are poorly represented.

Because of the relative proximity to the settlement on site 5a-5b and the special character of the finds, it was suggested that these clusters including the more substantial one on field block 31 are the remains of a necropolis. Admittedly the fact that they were found dispersed across a fairly large area of about 300 meters is to certain degree confusing. One would expect to find the remains of a communal necropolis concentrated over a smaller area, although it is possible that we are dealing with dispersed family burial-plots. In terms of artifact density these clusters produce densities similar or slightly higher than those recorded on the periphery of site 5a-5b. It is the character and the quality of the finds that clearly distinguish them from the rest of the off-site material, although it has to be repeated that unlike during some other periods, the material from Roman necropoleis doesn't exhibit a particularly distinct characteristics.

The total grid survey on field blocks in sector V and the southern half of sector VII confirmed the absence of Roman or Late Roman sites in the eastern half of Prisoj's southern foothills (map III_31a). In these survey sections artifact density is even lower than on field blocks in sector II, only rarely exceeding the mean overall of 1.5 fragments per 100 sq meters. This situation was made apparent by the individual transect collections. Across this entire stretch, artifact density remained below the mean overall value and this pattern remains unaltered after adjusting the transect collections to represent 100% of the material counted (map III_31b). But it is the character of the material and the complete absence of focalization that were decisive in distinguishing this zone from the thin clusters of fine pottery to the south of site 5a-5b and interpreting them as off-site debris generated by the small hamlet 300 to 700 meters from the fields. The local fabric groups that predominated the surface record on site 5a-5b reappear on these fields, but now they are regularly badly worn and with eroded surfaces. Unlike in the supposed necropolis area, the compositions of the off-site collections are more balanced with roughly equal amounts of architectural ceramics and plain fabrics and very little coarse pottery (graph 14, Appendix II).

After the Late Iron Age, the Roman-Late Roman Period is the second period for which we have evidence for off-site discard. In the case of the Roman-Late Roman assemblage, this off-site carpet is more extensive, not showing even the slightest sign of clustering. This ultra-thin but persistent carpet spreads for a maximum distance of 750 meters from the centre of site 5a, before running into the impact zone of a contemporary, smaller settlement on site 8. According to the transect collections, it is even possible that it partly spread into the valley floor. Thus although generated by a three times smaller settlement, this extensive impact zone is almost as large as that produced by the Late Iron Age village. Moreover while the Late Iron Age off-site showed considerable discontinuities and clustering suggesting that it could at least partly come from disturbed satellite deposits, the Roman-Late Roman carpet is continuous with a slight increase on field blocks surrounding site 5a-5b, probably related to the site halo or disturbed burials. These differing patterns of dispersal indicate that different mechanisms created the Late Iron Age and the Roman-Late Roman off-site. The pattern of the former points to more concentrated industrial, agricultural or ritual activities, while that of the latter looks more like the diminished remnants of a once denser off-site carpet created by prolonged spreading of unsorted manure on the fields at Prisoj's southern foot.

Studying the large collections of Late Iron Age finds from the southern half of site 8 situated about 800 meters east of site 5a, we came across a small group of finds that could be dated to the Late Roman Period (graph 14, Appendix II). It all seemed as if the off-site carpet documented on grids 6, 8 and 9 continued to spread across the fields at Prisoj's eastern foot. However the character of these finds was completely different from the worn fragments collected

from sectors V and the southern half of sector VII. Particularly prominent was a group of fine, gray-fired pottery. It was possible to distinguish them from the more dominant Paionian gray ware by the presence of a fine slip, slightly darker than the color of the paste. This material finds parallels on the majority of excavated Late Roman settlements and it is dated to the 4th century or later¹³¹. It was accompanied by small quantities of locally produced plain fabrics and very little tile and coarse pottery. Apart from this radical change in the composition of the collections of Roman material from grid 10, there is also a slight increase in the artifact density from the surrounding fields.

These sudden changes in the off-site zone became more comprehensible after the surprising discovery of a small Late Roman site in the hearth of the Late Iron Age village, on field block 126 covered by grid 12 (map III_32). The individual transect collections on this field unit recorded an artifact density only slightly higher than the overall mean density, which was related to the very low quality of the surface finds. Indeed if we assume that the collections were limited to the number of finds counted, field block 126, like the rest of the field blocks in sectors VI and VII becomes part of the low density zone, undistinguishable from the off-site at Prisoj's southern foot (cf. maps III_32a and 32b). As discussed in Appendix II, there is no doubt that this merely reflects an underestimate of the true amounts of surface material on certain field blocks in sector VII during the quantification campaign. In fact the total grid survey recorded the highest densities of Roman material in the survey area precisely on field block 126, reaching 18 and 20 fragments per 100 sq meters in the southern half of the grid (table 23, Appendix II). As the detailed analysis of the grid survey results showed, this was a larger farmstead measuring a maximum of 3500 sq meters. Being surrounded by thickly overgrown stretches on three sides, parts of the site periphery and the site halo remain hidden. It is nonetheless certain that the site halo wasn't very extensive. It probably spread mostly to the south of the site core and onto the valley floor, but not on field blocks to the north where the total grid survey (grids 13 and 14) recorded a very sparse off-site carpet.

Despite the fact that the Late Roman cluster on site 8 was the densest in the survey area, it was almost completely overwhelmed by the much denser Late Iron Age assemblage. It is another stark illustration of the relative sparseness of the Roman material in this survey area. Although overlaying the earlier Late Iron Age settlement and characterized by a wider spectrum of ceramic artifacts, the Late Roman phase failed to obscure the remains of the earlier settlement. On the contrary until the study of the collected finds was completed, it remained totally invisible.

There are apparent similarities between the Roman collections from sites 8 and 5a (graph 15, Appendix II). The same types of brick and tile are present in both assemblages, though certain groups predominant in one of the assemblages appear in smaller quantities in the other. This is also true for the finer fabric categories and the coarse ware. Most of the fabric groups found on site 8 can also be seen among the collection from site 5a. Nevertheless certain fabrics are clearly more numerous on site 8, particularly a semi-reduced fabric group, often decorated with incised linear or wavy patterns. This is one of the favorite decorative patterns in the local pottery production between the late 4th and late 6th century AD¹³². Examples decorated in this

¹³¹ V. Stojanović-Anderson, 14-18, 1992.

¹³² M. Ončevska-Todorovska, *Docnoantička грнčarija od Skupi*, Skopje 2004, especially tables 34-36; the author explicitly relates these decorative patterns with stew-pots. It should be stressed that very similar decorative techniques and patterns characterize the pottery of the Early Middle Age, B. Ristevski, Medieval ceramics from the Skopje area, 49-71, *Macedonian Heritage* 21, 2004; A.K. Vionis, J. Poblome, M. Waelkens, The hidden material culture of the Dark Ages. Early Medieval ceramics from Sagalassos (Turkey): new evidence (ca AD 650-800), 147-165, *Anatolian Studies* 29, 2009.

manner rarely appear among the material from site 5a-5b, although the fabric is clearly present. Possibly this reflects a slight chronological difference between the two sites, the assemblage found on site 8 being slightly later. It is evident that on this site there is a narrower spectrum of fabric groups than on site 5a. This could also reflect a shorter life-span of site 8, though if this is truly the case, the much higher artifact density becomes even more baffling. One is tempted to relate it to the fragmented character of the finds on field 126. The two sites are also similar in another aspect: both are associated with scatters of fine imported pottery situated about 150 meters from the site cores. These satellite clusters are comprised of imported table ware that although possibly contemporary with the settlement sites, doesn't appear among the on-site collections.

To the north of the Late Roman cluster on site 8, both the quantity and the character of the material change yet again (table 23, mapsIII_32, 32a and 32b). On field blocks 125 and 113a-b covered by grids 13 and 14, the density of Roman finds drops to an off-site level. Individual badly worn fragments were collected from a dozen grid units randomly dispersed across the gridded area. They give densities lower than 2 fragments per 100 sq meters. The composition of the collection also changes with roughly equal presence of architectural ceramics and plain fabrics and a considerable percentage of unrecognizable fragments. This composition is almost identical to the composition of the off-site collections from grids 6, 8 and 9 in sectors V and VII (graph 15, Appendix II).

About 275 meters to the north of the Late Roman farm on site 8 rises a low hillock dominating over the middle section of the small valley. Like the larger hillock at the southeast corner of the survey area it was made of pinkish conglomerates and like the latter, it was fortified sometime during the Roman Period. The faint architectural remains discovered on the top of the hillock and at its western foot were defined as site 9 and described in Appendix I. On field blocks surrounding this small hill-fort, the transect survey recorded average overall quantities and an average amount of Roman-Late Roman material (map III_32a). In fact the highest density of 6.8 fragments per 1000 sq meters was discovered on field block 122, to the east of the hill-fort, but this concentration came to light only after the processing of the finds. However as argued in the preceding paragraphs and in Appendix II, on some of the field blocks in sector VII, transect collections were more intensive, representing at least 100% of the material counted. Assuming that only counted finds were collected would rank this entire sector below the survey average (map III_32b).

Wanting primarily to explore the relation between the small fortification and the surface finds on fields at its western foot, we limited the grid survey to field blocks 114 and 115 covered by grid 15. The total collections by regular grid units confirmed the results of the individual transect collection. There was only a slight increase of Roman finds on these field blocks. The maximum density barely reached 4 fragments per 100 sq meters and the average density per gridded area is much lower, although still higher than on grids 6 or 13 (table 23, Appendix II). Predictably the majority of the Roman finds came from grid units closer to the foot of the hill-fort and the abovementioned architectural remains. But their quantity, character and inner distribution suggested that there was no permanent settlement on this location. The slightly increased artifact density could result from less intensive, non-residential activities. Indeed site 9 and the surrounding fields offer a perfect setting for a refugium for the small community that inhabited the surveyed basin. This is one of the best sheltered locations in the survey area, supplied with a freshwater spring only a few hundred meters to the north.

On the eastern bank of the central valley, the overall quantity of Roman finds roughly equals the amounts collected by field walking units in sectors VII and II (graph 11, Appendix II). The average density in sector IX is slightly over 2 fragments per 1000 sq meters, although there lack larger concentrations. The density of Roman material recorded by the transect survey never exceeds 1 fragment per 100 sq meters, even if we assume that all counted material was collected (table 24, Appendix II). However the amount of the total surface record is nearly twice as low as in the western survey sectors, while Roman finds comprise a significant portion, though they are still in the shadow of earlier periods, such as the Hellenistic or the possible Late Neolithic. As explained in Appendix I, the Late Ottoman-Early Modern off-site material from the village comprising a large fraction of the surface record in sectors west of the valley, spreads in a very thin carpet on the opposite bank. The decrease in artifact density is nearly ten-fold. In such circumstances it is much easier to recognize clusters of surface finds from earlier periods, but at the same time they can appear fairly insignificant and escape closer attention.

According to the results of the individual transect collections there were no major concentrations of Roman material in sector IX, on the Ramnište Ridge (maps III_32a and 32b). We see the zone of less than 10 Roman shards per 1000 sq meters of transect survey spreading over the majority of the field units that belong to this sector. On the southern half of the ridge, on field blocks covering site 11 and its immediate surroundings the density of Roman finds is slightly higher fluctuating between 1 and 4.8 fragments per 1000 sq meters. After a brief sterile interval in the central part of the sector, there is a slight recovery on field blocks in the northern end of the sector with artifact densities lower than 1.5 fragments per 1000 sq meters. It all seemed as if this was a continuation of the off-site carpet covering the western half of the survey, the quantity of the Roman finds decreasing towards the more peripheral field units at the foot of the Radičica Massif. But the careful study of the collected material and the more detailed total grid collections on sites 11 and 12 proved otherwise.

The total grid collections on site 11 were primarily concentrated on the dense clusters of prehistoric material. They only confirmed the presence of very small quantities of Roman material on field block 157, already indicated by the field block survey (map III_33). According to the individual transect collections, the Roman material was mostly concentrated on field blocks 159, to the north of site 11 and on field block 192, on the lower terrace. Assuming that the individual transect collections were limited to the number of finds counted, the zone of higher artifact density is completely limited to field block 159, while field blocks 192 and 193 merge into the off-site. It is no doubt unfortunate that field block 159 was left out of the total grid survey. However if there was a larger concentration of Roman finds on these two field blocks approaching the on-site thresholds on sites 5a-5b or 8, one would expect to see at least a portion of the halo of this hypothetical site on the grid covering site 11. Instead the density of Roman material on this location remains well below the on-site threshold recorded in the western survey sectors (cf. tables 22 and 24, Appendix II). In terms of artifact density it is not different from the distribution in the off-site zone at Prisoj's southern foot, but the character of the finds and the composition of the collection change significantly. Only a very small percentage of the Roman collection could be dated more specifically to the Late Roman Period. The Late Roman plain fabrics commonly encountered in the survey's western sectors nearly disappear, while the percentage of coarse and plain fabrics broadly datable to the Roman Period remains stable. Most significantly there is a sharp increase in the amount of architectural ceramics and the tile collected from this entire sector didn't belong to the same fabrics as those in the survey's western sectors. This increased concentration of architectural ceramics on the southern tip of the

Ramnište Ridge was eventually interpreted as the remains of less intensive, non-residential activities. The suggestion was mostly based on the large size and the nearly intact surfaces of the tile fragments collected from field blocks 159 and 192. Fragments that are preserved so well that a number of them could be fitted together must have originated from recently disturbed deposits. That is why it was surmised that there was a smaller, non-residential site near the border between field blocks 192 and 159 that was left just outside the total grid survey on site 11. On the other hand, the nearly 10% of coarse ware attached to the Roman collection from site 11 and comprising nearly 20% of all Roman finds in sector IX must be treated with suspicion. As explained earlier, this class of pottery is strongly conservative and one can hardly distinguish between coarse fabrics accompanying Roman and pre-Roman assemblages. Therefore it is possible that most of the examples of coarse pottery from this sector belong to the predominant Hellenistic assemblage.

In the central parts of sector IX, the results of the transect survey weren't confirmed by the total grid collections (map III_34). The study of the material collected from the predominantly Hellenistic site 12 revealed an equally large but thinner cluster of fragments, belonging to the soft-orange fabric group. This is the same fabric group that signaled an earlier pre-4th century phase on site 5a-5b and was found in larger quantities in the possible necropolis area to the south of this site. On site 12 it forms a fairly compact cluster situated immediately west of the core of the Hellenistic site (map III_35). Judging solely by the dispersal area of this group of finds, the Hellenistic farmstead experienced only a slight contraction during the Roman Period measuring about 1200 sq meters. It has also evidently shifted a couple of dozens meters to the west. Remarkably the maximum density of this material equals the maximum density recorded on site 5a. As on site 5a it is certain that an unknown portion of the coarse ware on site 12 accompanied the soft-orange fabric group (graph 17, Appendix II). But even if assuming that all coarse ware discovered on grid units covering the core of the Roman cluster belonged to the Roman assemblage wouldn't increase the size of this site. It would merely elevate the on-site density drawing a clearer distinction between the site core and the site halo. It must be emphasized that the very small amount of architectural ceramics from site 12 is distributed independently of the soft-orange fabric group.

The off-site impact of this small farm remains even more elusive. It is nonetheless clear that it didn't produce a very extensive off-site carpet. Indirectly this circumstance supports the thesis that the Hellenistic farm on site 12 wasn't an isolated establishment on the Ramnište Ridge. The clusters of Hellenistic material discovered on a number of locations in sector IX can hardly be explained as satellites or off-site debris emanating from the small farmstead on site 12. On the other hand the soft-orange fabric group in sector IX was found almost completely limited to site 12.

With the exception of brick and tile fragments, the great majority of possible Roman finds collected by field walking units in sector IX either belong to the soft-orange fabric group or to one of the coarse fabric groups broadly datable to the Roman Period. The overall density of off-site Roman finds is lower than in sectors on the western bank and the character of the finds is obviously different. The Late Roman finds are present in very small quantities. It is noteworthy that outside the limits of site 12, the few examples of the soft orange fabric or the accompanying coarse ware mostly follow the smaller clusters of Hellenistic material, such as those on field blocks 160-164 and 168. The distribution of this material doesn't follow the distribution of tile and it is rarely accompanied by the Late Roman fabrics. Spatially it seems rather more related to the Hellenistic assemblage, which could also reflect its actual chronology. This clearly implies

that the off-site carpet of Roman finds documented in the western survey sectors didn't spread in equal intensity on the opposite bank. Knowing the size of the settlements in the western survey half, this is hardly a surprise. The increased average density for sector IX is chiefly due to the presence of a thin scatter of brick and tile collected from field units in its southern part, near site 11 and by the cluster on site 12. Unless the architectural ceramics is dated Late Roman, this period nearly disappears from sector IX.

The individual transect collections from sector X, the Jakupica Ridge clearly indicate a significant presence of Roman material on at least three locations (map III_36a). On two pairs of field blocks on the tip of the Jakupica Ridge, on field blocks 133-134 and 142a-142b, the transect survey recorded over 10 fragments per 1000 sq meters (table 26, Appendix 2). These field units are surrounded by field blocks featuring average or lower than average artifact densities, as if forming halos over the two closely spaced clusters. To the north, on field blocks covering the central parts of the sector, Roman finds nearly disappear from the surface. They reappear about 750 meter to the north of field blocks 142a-142b, on a group of contingent field blocks at the western foot of Radičica, field blocks 152a-155. Thus to a large degree, the pattern revealed in sector IX is repeated, with the crucial difference that the concentrations at the northern and the southern end of sector X are considerably larger and denser.

Failing to carry out total grid survey at least on some of these locations largely deprived us of the possibility to offer more precise definition of the site limits and its inner structure. On the basis of the individual transect collections, it was merely possible to conclude that the pair of Roman sites didn't spread across the entire field block area and they probably didn't form compact clusters. We rather encountered a series of smaller clusters, often standing more than 10 meters apart. This was especially pronounced on field blocks 142a-142b or site 13b. Although it can't be demonstrated through the results of the individual transect collections, site 13b was made up of a series of smaller clusters, especially concentrated in the southern halves of the field blocks (map III_37a). Only rare fragments spread over the northern halves of field blocks 142a and 142b and over field block 143 to the east. Because of this focalized and discontinuous on-site distribution, it would have been difficult to determine the size of this site even if a total grid survey was carried out. It was reckoned that the maximum site area is not larger than 5-6000 sq meters, but considering the sum of the separate clusters only, it is certainly much smaller.

Site 13a, about 110 meters to the west and on a lower terrace comprised a more compact and continuous cluster, with an evident focus in the central parts of field block 133 and the eastern half of field block 134. There is a gradual decrease along a south-north axis, though as on site 13b, we observed that small groups of finds were separated by sterile stretches. Beyond the limits of fields 133 and 134, Roman material becomes even sparser. Site 13a was clearly limited to these two field units. Excluding their westernmost quarters where the transect collections included but isolated fragments, site 13a could spread over an area of nearly 8000 sq meters. It is thus potentially as large as the settlement on site 5a.

Why were these relatively large sites underestimated during the transect survey? Earlier it was pointed to the sparseness of the material on this location relative to the large quantities encountered in the sectors closer to the modern village. If the Roman-Late Roman material on site 5a-5b was found unaccompanied by finds from other periods, it would have hardly appeared more substantial than sites 13a and 13b. Lacking the high resolution of the total grid survey complicates the direct comparison between the two sites regarding artifact density. Comparing the results of the individual transect collections, the two pair of clusters look equally substantial, site 13b being even slightly denser than site 5a (table 26, Appendix II). But as the individual

transect collections on these field blocks were not equally thorough, this comparison is misleading. It is equally deceptive to increase the transect records on sites 13a and 13b by a factor of 2.5 and compare them with the grid survey records on site 5a-5b, because transect collections on the former were more thorough amounting to a total collection by 80x3 meters large strips. Estimating the artifact density for each of these individual transects and correcting for the ground visibility factor only, we see that the artifact densities on sites 13a and 13b are indeed lower than on sites 5a-5b and 8. It is both the low overall artifact density and the sparseness of Roman material that contributed to the inconspicuousness of the clusters on sites 13a and 13b.

In fact if we adjust the individual transect collections so that they represent 100% of the material counted on all field blocks, the density of Roman material on field blocks in sector X is slightly decreased and they join the zone of average artifact density (map III_36b). This puts them in the same rank as the field blocks covering portions of the halo of site 5a-5b or the intermediary density scatters in sector IX. Locally however the concentrations on site 13a-13b still present a considerable increase from the surrounding field units, with density 5 to 6 times the sector's average. Apart from indicating that the clusters on sites 13a and 13b are less substantial than those in the western survey sectors, the adjusted record of the individual transect collections revealed only slight changes in the on-site distribution pattern, further emphasizing its multi-focal, discontinuous character (map III_37b).

Another circumstance that distinguishes sites 13a and 13b from the main residential sites in the western survey sectors is the character and the composition of the surface material. The clusters that constitute sites 13a and 13b are almost exclusively made up of architectural ceramics (graph 19, Appendix II). Fragments of brick and tile made in fabrics different than those encountered on sites 5a-5b and 8 were accompanied by very small amounts of badly worn pottery fragments. Plain pottery is particularly scarce, while coarse fabrics are exclusively represented by pithos fragments. This is not untypical for rural sites of the Roman Period¹³³. Roman Period clusters predominantly made of architectural ceramics are known from regional projects in Greece and we'll also encounter them in the second survey area.

The differences between the assemblages collected from sites 5a-5b and 13a-13b could merely result from the different taphonomic processes on the two locations. It has long-since been acknowledged that the amount and the quality of surface material are largely determined by specific post-depositional processes and events, as well as the agricultural season in which the survey took place¹³⁴. In addition it is highly probable that the different clusters of Roman to Late Roman material discovered in this survey area experienced different histories of recycling and removal, both prior to and after deposition and abandonment¹³⁵. We should nevertheless consider the possibility that sites 13a and 13b are special-purpose sites. The relatively large amount of overfired tile wasters on site 13b could point to industrial activities or tile kilns, though in such a case it is strange that these tile fabrics almost never found their way among the collections from sites 5a-5b and 8. One also thinks of other forms of non-residential activities, primarily the storage and processing of agricultural goods. It must be stressed that only a few of the fragments

¹³³ J.L. Bintliff, P. Howard, A.M. Snodgrass, 2007; W. Cavanagh, C. Mee and P. James, et al. 2005; H. Bowden, D. Gill, *Late Roman Methana*, 84-91, C. Mee, H. Forbes eds, 1997. For a summary of this phenomena see now J. Bintliff, *The Complete Archaeology of Greece: From Hunter-gatherers to the 20th century AD*, Wiley-Blackwell 2012.

¹³⁴ J.F. Cherry, 398-399, D.R. Keller, D.W. Rupp, eds. 1983 J.L. Bintliff, A.M. Snodgrass, 123-135, 1985.

¹³⁵ D. K. Pettegrew, 189-201, 2001; J.T. Peña, *Roman Pottery in the Archaeological Record*, Berkeley 2007.

of plain pottery were identical to the predominant Late Roman fabrics on sites in the western survey sectors, implying that sites 13a and 13b were at least partly contemporary with the rest of the Late Roman sites in the survey area. Even if we allow for a certain chronological difference between these two groups of clusters, the presence of two completely different sets of tile fabrics on field blocks east and west of the central valley is surely striking. This sharp divergence in the distribution of the most prevalent classes of Roman material must be related to local patterns of production and distribution. Either the establishment on sites 13a-13b had its own local production of brick and tile or the material was brought from elsewhere. Apart from the similarities in the shape of tiles and the few examples of pottery fabrics identical to those found on the sites in the survey's western sectors, the two assemblages appear almost unrelated.

Interpreting the possible character and rank of sites 13a and 13b, one also needs to consider the regional context surrounding the surveyed area. We return to this problem in the conclusion to this section. For the moment, it suffices to mention the proximity of these two sites to the main east-west communication axis and the possibility that during the Roman Period, this was an active section of the Scupi – Stobi - Thessalonica road. The border-line between the provinces Macedonia and Moesia Superior (Dardania in the Late Roman Period) also passed nearby the survey area. In such circumstances one shouldn't exclude the possibility of a state-sponsored construction along this important corridor. At least some of the numerous Late Roman forts in the wider region may be viewed in this light, especially the very strategic 2 hectare large fort on site 10, situated 300 meters to the south of sites 13a and 13b.

But turning back to the transect survey evidence and the location of the two clusters, we note two important details suggesting that site 13a-13b could be settlement locations after all. This is firstly indicated by the extent of the Roman cluster covering most of the southern tip of the Jakupica Ridge. Although we lack a finer spatial resolution, it is evident that the main clusters on field blocks 133-134 and 142a-142b are surrounded by a zone of lower artifact density spread over the neighbouring field blocks to the east and west. It represents a nearly identical pattern to that discovered on field blocks surrounding site 5a-5b and we'll see further parallels from the second survey area¹³⁶. It is difficult to see this fairly extensive peripheral zone as an exclusive result of site weathering and post-depositional dislocations. It is indicative that it spreads over field boundaries which can't be of a very recent date and only on certain sides of the site areas. But if this zone truly represents the phenomenon of site halo resulting from the combined effects of site weathering and intensive in-field cultivation, then we have to allow that sites 13a and 13b represent the remains of a residential site. Industrial and non-residential sites in general aren't expected to leave very extensive impact zones, though it has to be admitted that we still don't know the signatures of these site categories in the surface record.

The second important observation concerns the great similarity between the pair of sites 5a-5b and 13a-13b, their positioning relative to each other and their location in the surrounding landscape. In both cases we have two closely spaced clusters of similar size; one larger and relatively continuous positioned on a more fertile stretch of land, the other smaller and discontinuous with a less favorable micro-location. Moreover both pairs of sites are situated on similar micro-topographic units, on the very edges of the surveyed basin. These locations are strategically important in the local context for they control the western and eastern entrances in the basin of Sopot. This tendency to occupy twin locations is characteristic for settlements of all periods. In the case of the Roman settlements in the first survey area, we see them concentrating

¹³⁶ Also cf. J. Bintliff, *The Leiden University Ancient Cities of Boeotia Project: 2005 season at Tanagra*, 29-38, *Pharos* 13, 2006; J.L. Bintliff, P. Howard, A.M. Snodgrass eds. 23-24, 2007.

on the edges of the local basins and avoiding the inner part of the small valley. As argued, site 5a-5b was evidently exploiting the southern foothills of Prisoj, while the possible settlement on site 13a-13b could either focus on the Ramnište Ridge or on the neighbouring valley to the east of the survey area.

In our final interpretation we see the clusters on sites 13a-13b as the remains of a fully or seasonally inhabited residential site, of a lower rank than the hamlet on site 5a-5b. It was located in the drier half of the landscape, surrounded on all sides by the less fertile, Neogene soils. Micro-topographically and strategically this may have been a location similar to that occupied by site 5a-5b, but it is situated in a less favourable pedological and hydrological context.

The last definite cluster of Roman material featuring artifact densities higher than the on-site threshold was discovered about 750 meters to the north of site 13b, in the northern end of sector X (map III_38a). This is a different micro-topographic unit, the western foot of the Radičica Massif. After almost completely disappearing from the central parts of the Jakupica Ridge, Roman finds reappear on the surface reaching densities higher than the mean overall values on field blocks 152a-155 (table 26 in appendix II). According to the transect collections, the highest artifact density was on field block 152a, but we saw that this was determined by the unequal size of the field blocks and the uneven distribution of the finds within the field block area. The largest concentration of relatively well preserved finds came from the eastern half of field block 155. This fact becomes more apparent once we assume that the individual transect collections were limited to the number of finds counted during the quantification campaign (map III_38b).

The collection from the easternmost third of field block 155 revealed a tiny cluster, consisting of not more than a couple of dozen finds and occupying a maximum area of a couple of hundreds square meters. On the surrounding field units, although featuring similar or even higher artifact densities, we couldn't detect distinct cores. The poorly preserved finds were found randomly scattered across a larger area. However if the small cluster on field block 155 was the sole focus of activity in this part of the survey area, then how to explain the fairly extensive carpet of Roman material spreading over several contiguous field units and over the entire northern end of sector IX? We therefore suspect that at least one or two other clusters of similar size went unnoticed or were reduced to thin inconspicuous scatters by post-depositional disturbances. A likely location is field block 152a, where although we failed to notice a definite concentration, the transect collections clearly indicate increased density of Roman material. As almost 100% of the finds on these field blocks date to the Roman-Late Roman Period, the observations about the distribution of the total surface record presented in Appendix I are still valid.

The clusters on field block 155 and 152a or sites 14 and 15 represent similarly composed assemblages to those collected from sites 13a and 13b. They too comprise a very limited array of forms and fabrics. There are nevertheless certain differences (graph 19, Appendix II). Tile is not as predominant as on sites 13a, 13b and in sector I. It comprises 50% of the collection from field block 155 and less than 70% of all Roman finds from field blocks 152a-155. Pithos fragments feature even more prominently than on site 13b. The majority were collected from field block 155, though a pair came from field block 152a, again pointing to the second potential cluster of Roman finds in this part of the survey. On field blocks 152b and 153, we mostly collected worn fragments of architectural ceramics. There is very little plain pottery mostly datable to the Late Roman Period, while examples of cooking fabrics were virtually absent.

These small and isolated clusters were certainly contemporary with the establishments on sites 13a and 13b. They were made up of the same tile fabrics and formats. The lower artifact density, the smaller size of the clusters and their extremely isolated location define them as an analogous phenomenon of satellite clusters, frequently encountered during the analysis of the distribution of prehistoric assemblages. To some degree it offers a further support for the view that sites 13a and 13b are indeed settlement remains. The clusters on field units 152a-155 occupy the western foot of the Radičica Massif, almost a kilometer away from the Skopje-Thessalonica road. This micro-topographic unit stands between 30 and 40 meters above the floor of the small valley. It overlooks the valley's middle course and the small hill-fort on site 9. The western foot of Radičica is one of the most isolated corners of the surveyed basin. There is no direct communication with the valley floor and there is little flat land in the foothills. The local soils are thin and stony and there is no water on the surface. This is not a likely settlement location. It is not only withdrawn from all major resources in the area (arable land, water, communications), but it offers a very limited living space.

There are almost no Roman finds in sector VIII, at Gaber's northern foot (maps III_38c and 38d). Only a couple of worn tile fragments were collected from the westernmost transects in this sector; possibly a continuation of the dispersed cluster on the southern tip of the Ramnište or an infiltration from the off-site carpet on the opposite bank of the valley. We expected to discover more finds from the fortified area on site 10, knowing its fairly large size, elaborate layout and strategic positioning. But we only came across another couple of tile fragments. Interestingly they were made in fabrics similar to the fabrics found on sites in the western sectors and were different from the predominant fabric groups on sites 13a and 13b.

The general scarcity of surface finds in this survey sector is surprising, especially the absence of residential remains on site 10 (table 27, Appendix II). A small village could comfortably fit into the fortified area. The location offered not only a close control over the eastern pass linking the basin of Sopot with the northern half of the Veles Basin, but it also had access to larger stretches of fertile land, both in the surveyed basin and in the neighbouring valley to the east. It is possible that the area was avoided because of the lack of freshwater springs and its northern aspect. During most of the year, the Gaber casts a shadow over this part of the landscape, a circumstance that is neither favorable for human habitation nor for the growth of cereals.

Predictably the overall density of surface finds sharply decreases in sector XI, in the upper course of the surveyed valley (maps III_39a and 39b). Most of the area is covered by dense wild vegetation, although there were a number of cultivated fields. However we were surprised to discover that more than half of the collected finds dated to the Roman-Late Roman Period and only a quarter to the Late Ottoman-Early Modern Period (graph 20, Appendix II). The maximum density of slightly over 2 fragments was recorded on a field unit in the sector's southern end. This is a tiny collection of a few fragments of tile and a pithos fragment, though in the context of the very low background density in this sector, it is possible that these are the scant remains of non-residential buildings, similar to those discovered on field blocks 152a-155 or on the southern tip of sector IX. Equally significant, the composition of this tiny collection repeats the composition of the collections from field blocks 152a-155. They consist entirely of worn tile and pithos fragments. It is unlikely that this thin scatter is a continuation of the off-site carpet covering the western survey sectors. This survey sector is situated over 1200 meters from the small farmstead on site 8 and nearly 2.5 kilometers from the hamlet on site 5a-5b. Both sites are too small to produce an off-site carpet of such an extent. Alternatively the scant surface

remains in sector XI could signal the presence of yet another residential site that the transect survey failed to detect. Although presently overgrown and deserted, this area presents at least 50 hectares of arable land. It is a smaller but geographically well-defined settlement niche that could comfortably sustain a settlement of the rank of a farmstead or a small hamlet.

III.1.12 The Late Byzantine and Early Ottoman Period (14th-18th century, tables 28-29, graphs 22-23 in Appendix II)

As with the majority of the periods represented in the surface record of the first survey, there are very few published studies on pottery production from the post-antique era and this applies to most countries on the Balkan Peninsula. These studies are further limited to the luxurious and table ware from the Middle and the Late Byzantine Periods¹³⁷. The situation is even worse when it comes to pottery from the Ottoman Period in the Central Balkans, for which we lack even a very general introductory study. In such circumstances it proved impossible to work with a finer chronology. It was merely possible to distinguish the fabric groups produced after the late 18th century; basically because they're characterized by higher firing temperature resulting in very good solidity and because of the frequent use of vitreous, monochrome glaze, usually poorly fused with the body. Evidently these finds are predominant among the post-Antique surface material. The other chronological category consisted of less widespread fabric groups, almost exclusively concentrated in the southern part of sector II, southwest of the modern village. They are characterized by less sophisticated modelling, thicker walls and unstable firing conditions. Only a handful of fragments had traces of lead glaze, in most cases poorly fused with the paste through a thin white slip or *engobe*. This feature was one of the rare chronological indicators. It is characteristic for the 14th and 15th century, when glazed pottery was produced more massively resulting in a visible decline in quality¹³⁸. Only one fragment had traces of fine *sgraffito* decoration. The dating of the rest of the finds from this assemblage relied on the experience and expertise of D-r B. Ristevski. These were fragments of plain local pottery, which could roughly be dated to the end of the Byzantine and the Early Ottoman Period.

There are no finds earlier than the 14th century among the assemblage collected west of the village. Only one or two fragments collected from other locations in the survey area could possibly date prior to the 14th century, but this is far from certain. In any case it suggests that if existent, the pre-14th century settlement was most probably situated elsewhere. It also remains unclear if the small assemblage found by the modern village represents this entire period of four centuries. Published studies of the Ottoman censuses and the local oral traditions revealed many cases of deserted and reoccupied villages or settlement displacement due to various historical events and processes. The small community of peasant serfs could be dislocated with little fuss on the order of the local landlord.

¹³⁷ B. Ristevski, 2004; B. Babić, Trouvaille scellée de poterie de table Byzantine à Skopsko Kale 45-54, *Archaeologica Iugoslavica* 13, 1971; I. Mikulčić, M. Bilbia, Markovi Kuli, Vodno, Skopje, 1977-1980, 205-220, *Macedoniae Acta Archaeologica* 7-8, 1981-1982; M. B. Hađi-Pešić, *Keramika u Srednjovekovnoj Srbiji*, Belgrade 1981.

¹³⁸ B. Ristevski, 2004; D. Minić, Prilog datovanju srednjovekovne keramike iz Kruševca, 43-49, *Starinar* XXX, 1980; J. Vroom, 2005, the chapter on Late Byzantine/Frankish period; A. Vionis, "Crusader" and "Ottoman" Material Life: The Archaeology of Built Environment and Domestic Material Culture in the Medieval and post-Medieval Cyclades, Greece, Leiden 2006.

The proposed dating also finds support in the written documents. The name Sopot appears for the first time in one exhaustive census for the region of Veles, roughly dated in the second quarter of the 15th century¹³⁹. This is the first written evidence relating specifically about the survey area. The fact that this document doesn't emphasize that Sopot was a newly established settlement, probably indicates that the village existed prior to the Ottoman conquest. It provides invaluable information about the size of the settlement and its main agricultural products in the centuries prior to the introduction of American cultures¹⁴⁰. Nearly half a century later the village of Sopot is included in another exhaustive census, for the year 1467-1468¹⁴¹. In this case the identity of the village is confirmed by the editors of the document. But comparing the data from the two censuses, one wonders if this is the same village, as there are considerable differences in the number of households and the amounts of taxes paid in cash or kind. According to the earlier census, Sopot had 21 households and produced a fairly limited array of agricultural goods; most prominently wheat, barley and grapes and smaller quantities of linen and honey. One generation later, the settlement has experienced a dramatic transformation. In the extensive census for the year 1467/168, Sopot had 30 households including a priestly family and produced a different and wider range of cultures. Wine was the most prominent product, accounting for over one third of the total amount of taxes paid in kind or in cash. It has to be stressed that wine appears rarely on the list of products that were taxed by the Ottomans¹⁴². Only a few villages from the entire administrative region of Veles paid tax in wine. Apart from wheat and barley, taxes were paid for growing rye, lentils and fruits, for bee-keeping and breeding pigs. Linen is not mentioned and there was no separate tax for the vineyards. Interestingly neither of the censuses mention sheep-herding, though it played an important role in many villages along the Mid-Vardar in later centuries.

The importance of this evidence reaches beyond the chronological limits of the Late Byzantine and Early Ottoman periods. We saw that in earlier periods, the size of the local settlement remained stable, its area rarely exceeding 1 hectare. As will be shown Late Byzantine and Early Ottoman Sopot didn't alter this pattern. Thus the data pertaining to this village also points to the potential population size of most of its predecessors. It is indicative that the majority of the villages in the surrounding micro-regions have between 15 and 30 households. The situation didn't change significantly until the middle of the 20th century. According to the later summary censuses dated to the 16th and 17th century, the number of households in Sopot and in most surrounding villages rarely exceeded 30 or fell below 15¹⁴³.

Despite the fairly rich historical information, Late Byzantine and Early Ottoman Sopot remained archaeologically elusive. It wasn't the pottery finds that revealed its location, but rather

¹³⁹ M. Sokolovski, A. Stojanovski, *Turski dokumenti za istorijata na makedonskiot narod*, 52, vol. II, Skopje 1973.

¹⁴⁰ In the Republic of Macedonia, as in most other former Yugoslav republics, plus Greece and Albania, the archaeological remains from the Ottoman Period have almost never been studied in their own right. Most references pertain to rescue excavations on more elaborate architectural monuments, for example the brief reports by B. Babić, Suli-an (Late Middle Ages-Ottoman Period), 163-164, *Arheološki Pregled* 9, 1967, B. Babić, I. Mikulčić, Skopje-a prehistoric and Medieval fortress, 162-163, *Arheološki Pregled* 9, 1967. The potential of this neglected field have been elucidated in a number of recent publications, S. Davies, J.L. Davis, eds. *Between Venice and Istanbul: Colonial Landscapes in Early Modern Greece*, *Hesperia Supplement* 40, 2007; J. Bintliff, H. Stoeger, eds. *Medieval and post-Medieval Greece, the Corfu papers*, Oxford 2009.

¹⁴¹ M. Sokolovski, 149-150, 1971.

¹⁴² Apparently because only certain landlords had the monopoly over the selling of wine on the territory of administrative units, M. Sokolovski, A. Stojanovski, 15, 1973.

¹⁴³ D. Georgiev, A. Šerif, *Turski dokumenti za istorijata na makedonskiot narod*, Skopje 1994.

the poor traces of building remains discovered on field blocks 15b, 20 and 21, 120 to 160 meters south-southwest of the village (III_map 42, photo III_1). These remains were discussed in Appendix I. However prior to the processing of the ceramic material, there were doubts about their character and date. In fact they were so meager it was thought they were the remnants of abandoned animal folds. Moreover we believed that the Late Byzantine and Early Ottoman settlement was somewhere in the immediate vicinity, perhaps under the houses of the present day village. Although evidence from other known villages of the çiftlik type, clearly suggested that the quarters of the land-owners and the peasant serfs were always built at a certain distance¹⁴⁴.

The difficulties in detecting the surface remains of Late Byzantine-Early Ottoman Sopot become understandable when we consider the very small amount of finds that could be dated to this period. Only about 100 fragments or 0.61% of the total surface record belong to some of the fabric groups which could date to the Late Byzantine-Early Ottoman Period (table 28, Appendix II). This could very well result from the fact that the bulk of this material came from intensified transect collections and not from total collections by regular grid surveys. But even if we suppose that in reality the number of Late Byzantine-Early Ottoman finds is 2.5 times greater, they would still represent one of the humblest assemblages in the first survey area, amounting to less than 1.5% of the total surface record. However it has to be stressed that in the case of the Late Byzantine-Early Ottoman assemblage, the correction for the lesser degree of survey intensity will probably produce slightly enhanced figures, not least because collections by individual transects were more thorough than normally. At the same time, this sparseness of the Late Byzantine-Early Ottoman surface cluster cannot be completely attributed to external factors, ground visibility conditions or collection technique. There is evidence suggesting that the ceramic assemblages from this period were genuinely humbler in comparison to some other periods, because of dining habits and the availability of cheap metal ware, most commonly copper alloys or iron¹⁴⁵.

Only after the careful study of the individual transects collection did we become aware of the relation between the weak building remains southwest of the village and the small group of finds datable to the Late Byzantine-Early Ottoman Period. For the greater part the scatters of building rubble and Late Byzantine-Early Ottoman pottery are overlapping. The former extends over field blocks 14-18b, while the latter was mostly concentrated on the narrow terraces to the south, on field blocks 19-20 and 21-72. The Late Byzantine-Early Ottoman scatter was thus left out of the total grid survey covering field blocks in the northern half of the sector and field blocks 15-16, south of the dirt road linking the village with the monastic complex on the Vardar Valley floor (map III_44). Because of the ground configuration in the southern end of sector II, narrow discontinuous terraces separated by relatively steep stretches, it was decided to carry out total collections by individual field transects. The laying out of a regular grid in these conditions would have been impractical and time consuming.

The detailed transect collections revealed a fairly large cluster of finds, extending from the western periphery of the modern village on the east, to a small limestone outcrop, about 250 meters to the west. These limits were already suggested in Appendix I. This site occupies one of the rare, physically well-defined micro-locations in the first survey. However there is no visible

¹⁴⁴ M. S. Filipović, 511, 1935; very close parallels have been encountered and studied in Greece, J. Bintliff, chapter 21, 2012.

¹⁴⁵ A. Vionis, Material culture studies: the case of the Medieval and post-Medieval Cyclades, 177-197, eds. J. Bintliff, H. Stoeger, *Medieval and post-Medieval Greece, the Corfu papers*, Oxford 2009.

physical limit to the north; on this side the site limits are indicated by the sudden disappearance of the scatter of building remains and loose stone rubble.

The site of the Late Byzantine-Early Ottoman village is further defined by the artifact densities recorded by the intensified transect survey (map III_44a and 44b, table 29, Appendix II). The more detailed collection of surface material defined a clear site threshold of over 6.5 fragments per 1000 sq meters. It includes the two southernmost rows of field blocks in sector II. From west to east, these are field blocks 19-20, 15b, 20a-20b, 18b, 21 and 72b-73. There are two separate cores characterized by artifact densities higher than 1 fragment per 100 sq meters. They correspond to the eastern and western scatters of building rubble, closely following the configuration of the local terrain. The eastern core is on field blocks 19 and 20 with 16.9 and 27 Late Byzantine-Early Ottoman shards per 1000 sq meters; the western core is situated about 130 meters to the west, on field block 21 with 22 fragments per 1000 sq meters. Given that all counted material was collected, this pattern is slightly changed. The western core is confined to field block 20, while the eastern core expands over field blocks 18b and 73. At the same time, both the maximum and the district average density increase, but the limits of the cluster remain the same.

The fields occupied by this site are narrow artificial terraces, presently uncultivated and covered with stone rubble and artifacts. It is possible that we are dealing with original units of deposition, although their dating remains unknown. It is noteworthy that similarly built terraces, presumably gardens abandoned by the middle decades of the last century, were discovered at the valley floor and even on the Vardar Valley floor, near its confluence with the studied valley (field blocks 10 and 11 in sector I). Moreover the mosaic of terraces continues to the north of site 4, subdividing the sloping terrain west of the village as described in Appendix I. Some of these terraces, such as those in the northern half of the sector are still being used as separate agricultural parcels, but on fields south of the dirt road modern agricultural divisions show no regard for the old terrace system. The eastern group of building remains and the terrace wall delimiting them from the north were completely ploughed over on field blocks 17 and 18a-18b. It is quite probable that we are dealing with an older modification of the landscape, only partly incorporated into the modern land-use system.

According to the individual transect collections there are no major concentrations of Late Byzantine-Early Ottoman material outside the southernmost terraces on site 4. However this material appears in smaller quantities on nearly all of the terraced fields. On field blocks north of the site the transect collections didn't include Late Byzantine-Early Ottoman finds, but total grid collection on grid 4 recorded a density of 6.6 fragments per 1000 sq meters on a few find-spots. Low quantities of the Late Byzantine-Early Ottoman material were also found among the grid and the transect collections from the field blocks in the northern half of the sector and among the heaps of material in the western half of the sector, on field blocks 8a-9b. However apart from the very small field blocks 8e and 8d, artifact density never exceeds the limits of 2.7 fragments per 1000 sq meters of transect survey and 6.6 fragments per 1000 sq meters of grid survey. To the south on the floor of the studied valley, visibility conditions precluded systematic survey, but the complete absence of material other than modern rubbish and the micro-topographic location make it unlikely that settlement spread near the old river-bed.

Unlike most of the sites from the Roman Period, in the case of the Late Byzantine-Early Ottoman settlement there is a clear coincidence between the distribution of building remains and the movable surface record. Moreover the original micro-topography of the site location and its immediate surroundings is relatively well preserved. Thanks to these factors and the relatively

sharp differences in the site and off-site artifact densities, we're rather confident that Late Byzantine-Early Ottoman Sopot occupied an area of about 1 hectare. It is nevertheless questionable if this entire area was occupied by dwellings or portions of it were left to open space or meadows; an arrangement that one can still witness in villages where the traditional layout has survived. It is also possible that isolated dwellings or maybe even a smaller quarter went unnoticed on the overgrown fields in the western half of the sector. But in general the size of the site doesn't contradict the information in the Early Ottoman censuses in that Sopot was a dependent hamlet with not more than 30 families in its heyday.

Late Byzantine-Early Ottoman Sopot generated one of the more extensive continuous off-site carpets in this survey area. Rare fragments datable to the Late Byzantine-Early Ottoman Period were found even among some of the total collections from sectors III and V, half a kilometer to the north of the settlement. It is nevertheless evident that the main impact zone of the village was limited to sector II. As in most other periods of human settlement in the survey area, the settlement and its impact zone were limited to a single micro-topographic unit. In the case of the Late Byzantine-Early Ottoman village, the site halo extended for a maximum of 200 meters from the site limits. This was a fairly compact carpet with artifact densities ranging between 1.5 and 2.7 fragments per 1000 sq meters. It is important to note that this material was found on the terraced fields above the settlement, clearly indicating that it was originally discarded on these fields and not dispersed through site weathering and other secondary dislocations. This phenomenon known from other regional survey projects has been interpreted as resulting from outbuildings, rubbish disposal and intensive agricultural activities, primarily gardening¹⁴⁶.

In terms of settlement size, the Late Byzantine and Early Ottoman periods didn't bring significant changes in the local history of human settlement. The central settlement retained the rank of a hamlet or a small village and as in many other periods, it was the sole focus of human habitation in the studied micro-region. The most obvious change from the previous epochs is the occupation of a previously uninhabited location. The earliest traces of human activity in sector II date to the Iron Age and there are also small amounts of Roman material, but these finds are either too scarce or comprise untypical assemblages. They were interpreted as off-site material or traces of non-residential activities. The location occupied by the Late Byzantine and Early Ottoman village features a number of particularities that distinguish it from the locations of earlier sites. Like site 5a-5b it lies on the edge of the fertile stretch at Prisoj's southern foot, the watershed between the Vardar and the central valley and at the contact zone between the Quaternary deposits and the barren Mesozoic limestone rocks crowning the Taor Gorge. The Late Byzantine and Early Ottoman village was established on a lower ground, literally hanging over the edge of the foothills. This location is hidden from sight, at least for those following the modern lines of communication or passing over the higher stretches along Prisoj's southern foot. It is practically its only defensive quality; otherwise the village could be easily accessed from literally any direction.

It seems that the major disadvantage in comparison to site 5a-5b is the absence of a freshwater spring in the immediate vicinity. As explained in the preceding section, drinking water is still carried by pipes from the spring by site 5a, about 500 meters from the village centre. There are a number of possible explanations why the local community gave up this advantage of site 5a-5b. Apart from offering a better shelter, site 4 had an immediate access both to the banks

¹⁴⁶ A suggestion that finds support in historical sources pertaining to the Late Roman and Byzantine periods, J. Bintliff, P. Howard, A. Snodgrass, 23, 2007.

of the central valley and the floor of the Vardar Valley. A narrow path running parallel to and below the modern dirt-road links the village with the small terraces in the eastern half of sector I, underlining the importance of this zone for the local community. These presently deserted stretches, apart from offering immediate access to running water are suitable for gardening.¹⁴⁷

The dating of site 1, the small rectangular tower by the banks of the Vardar, next to field block 7 remains problematic, though it is quite possible it coexisted with the Ottoman village. A narrow path slowly falling into oblivion connects the tower and the narrow terraces on the Vardar's left bank with the modern village, passing directly through the site of the Late Byzantine-Early Ottoman settlement. Local oral tradition recognizes it as the "Turkish guarding tower", presumably guarding a crossing over the Vardar. Presently there is a wooden hanging bridge 120 meters upstream, but at least until the late 19th century transport of goods across the river was mostly carried out by rafts¹⁴⁸. One can envisage a chain of similar towers along the banks of the Vardar, particularly in the narrow canyons along the river's middle and lower course. There were no traces of the suspected platform, as this entire stretch is silted by sand and modern debris deposited by the river. The architecture of the tower described in Appendix I is indeed similar to the two standing towers in the modern village. Not surprisingly there were only a few fragments of worn bricks or roof tiles amidst the large amount of roughly hewn stone blocks. Their fabric and probable format are clearly different from the Early Modern and Roman tile fabrics. There is unfortunately no other datable evidence on the surface.

III.1.13 The Late Ottoman and Early Modern Period (1800-1950 AD; tables 30-31, graphs 23-24, Appendix II)

Because of the chronological proximity and the fact that this period is still very much present through many aspects of material culture, it was never recognized as a veritable subject of archaeology. Specifically in the Republic of Macedonia, as in most other former Yugoslav republics, the material culture and the living traditions of this period are studied by folklorists and ethnographers. Unfortunately with the exception of some earlier studies, few scholars from these disciplines have dealt with issues such as settlement size and location or rural economy. On the other hand, although there are studies of the various categories of material culture relevant to archaeology and architecture in particular, there is practically no communication between the two disciplines. As a result not too many archaeologists can recognize pottery or building remains from the 19th or the early 20th century.

This situation presents a practical problem for the student of surface archaeology, even if one wishes to deliberately ignore this period. The surface of all regions inhabited during the past two centuries is usually always littered with vast amounts of debris produced by the Late Ottoman and Early Modern settlements. In many cases architectural remains are well preserved. In certain landscapes there are visible traces even of minor constructions, such as terrace walls, watermills or old cemeteries. It is not always easy to distinguish the remains of this and earlier architecture and the same problem surrounds the dating of certain pottery classes. But more importantly, it is theoretically unjustified to exclude the archaeological remains of the Late

¹⁴⁷ The use of the power of running water could also have been a locational factor, J.L. Bintliff, *The Ottoman era in the context of long-term settlement history. A case-study: the archaeological survey of the Valley of the Muses, Boeotia, Central Greece*, 203-229, *Arab Historical Review for Ottoman Studies* 19-20, 1999.

¹⁴⁸ J. Cvijić, 241, 1906, this practice survived until the last decade of the 19th century.

Ottoman and Early Modern period from the long-term study of a local settlement history¹⁴⁹. Many villages have been completely deserted by the middle decades of the last century. Except for rare mentions in historical documents and in earlier studies, the architectural remains and the carpet of surface debris are the only tangible evidence for the study of these settlements. On no ground can one exclude this material from the rest of the surface archaeological record. Finally by studying the size of the settlement, the dispersal area and the distribution of off-site material, we reveal one of the possible ways in which a landscape was adapted to the purposes of human settlement and exploitation. This could greatly help in the understanding of patterns in the past, usually featuring far more poorly preserved surface remains and uncertain social and historical contexts. One must bear in mind that although there were important changes in the general living conditions, production and economy, for the local communities the subsistence base and the technological capacities changed little prior to the industrialization of the country in the middle of the 20th century¹⁵⁰.

The material dated to the Late Ottoman and Early Modern period was set apart thanks to a number of specific fabric features. Most prominent were the great solidity of the paste and the application of a vitreous glaze, usually of a poor quality and applied directly to the paste. Certain shapes and decorative techniques are also exclusively related to this time-period. Nevertheless in certain aspects this material can closely resemble earlier pottery production, particularly certain classes of Late Roman pottery. It also proved problematic to recognize at least one class of cooking ware fabric. An exception is the characteristic bread-baking pan, but this pottery class has been in use since the Middle Age. The same was the case with the material dated to the Late Byzantine and Early Ottoman periods and this is probably related to the local or regional specifics of pottery production or the increased usage of metal vessels¹⁵¹. Distinct categories of coarse fabrics have been recently recognized among the material excavated from the Skopje citadel¹⁵² and among the Late Ottoman and Early Modern finds from the second survey area.

Like the assemblages from most other periods, the various fabric groups dated to the Late Ottoman and Early Modern Period for the greater part had overlying distribution patterns. This greatly helped in the determination of one or two fabric categories of uncertain date. The similarity of the distribution pattern of the various fabric classes not only indicates that they are contemporary, but also reveals that they were all discarded in a similar fashion. This material doubtlessly consists of debris generated by the village during the last two centuries. Fragments of tile and pottery could find their way on the surface of surrounding fields either as a part of unsorted manure or simply as a result of the local habits of waste disposal¹⁵³. Large amounts of modern building material, clothes and plastics can regularly be seen, especially on uncultivated fields close to the modern settlement and the local roads.

The off-site debris produced by the Late Ottoman and Early Modern village is the second most numerous chronological group on the surveyed surface. The actual percentage is probably even greater, as not all tile fragments were collected during the transect survey. Although less numerous than the Late Iron Age assemblage, this still seems as a rather substantial amount considering the size of the settlement and the short duration of the period in question. These

¹⁴⁹ J. Bintliff, 2012, S. Davies, J.L. Davis, eds. 2007.

¹⁵⁰ S. B. Sutton, Settlement patterns, settlement perceptions: Rethinking the Greek village, 313-336, ed. P.N. Kardulias, *Beyond the Site: Regional Studies in the Aegean*, 1994.

¹⁵¹ A.K. Vionis, 177-197, eds. J. Bintliff, H. Stoecker, 2009.

¹⁵² Brief reports are available at www.skopskokale.com.mk

¹⁵³ H. Forbes, 159-172, 2012.

finds are more than twice as numerous as the material broadly dated to the Roman Period, produced over a three times longer time-period. Moreover one should take into account that the Late Ottoman and Early Modern assemblage doesn't include the artifacts that are still on standing monuments or into everyday use. This large discrepancy must be related to the temporal factor and the declining preservation rate, particularly of fragments discarded on the surface of fields. One can imagine that in 2000 years, worn fragments of tile and rare potshards will be all that remain of the continuous carpet of over 4500 shards collected from this survey area (see table 30 in Appendix II).

The context and the origin of this material were already clear at the time of the field survey. There were no doubts that it was primarily accumulated through the repeated spreading of unsorted manure on the fields. This is also indicated by the pattern of dispersal revealed by both the transect and the regular grid surveys. The highest artifact densities were recorded in sectors II and IV, on the fields to the east and west of the modern village (maps III_46a and 46c). These fields are most easily accessed from the village and many are given to labour-intensive garden cultures, although there are also vineyards, cereal fields and meadows. Often the highest artifact densities were recorded on the fields adjacent to the village houses, such as field blocks 25 or 30. Although the artifact density is above the mean overall value of 10 fragments per 1000 sq meters on the majority of the field blocks in these sectors, on some of the units the amount of the Late Ottoman-Early Modern material is considerably diminished. In most cases these are abandoned fields or meadows, although small amounts of off-site debris were sometimes discovered even on cultivated fields.

In sectors III and V on the fields to the north of the village, finds datable to the Late Ottoman-Early Modern Period never approach the very high densities recorded in sectors II and IV. Indeed along certain stretches at Prisoj's foot, at a distance of only about 250 meters from the village periphery, this material completely disappears from the surface record (maps III_46a and 46c). These fields featured poor soils and were often abandoned or left fallow for longer periods of time. Quite appropriately the village cemetery is situated at the western end of this stretch, covered by field block 40. Here artifact density rose again to slightly over 1 fragment per 100 sq meters, although the origin of the finds is obviously different. These were table jugs and dishes left by the graves and often, intentionally broken. On the rest of the field blocks in these sectors the artifact density is close to the mean overall value and in comparison to sectors II and IV, there is little variation between the neighbouring field units.

This zone continues uninterrupted into Prisoj's eastern foothills (maps III_46b and 46d). The most distant field blocks featuring densities higher than the mean overall of 10 fragments per 1000 sq meters were located at a distance of over 1 kilometer from the centre of the modern village. In this sector there are evidently greater fluctuations in the artifact densities between the neighbouring field blocks, which again corresponds to the greater variety of land-use. Apart from overgrown fields there are meadows, parcels planted with cereals and vineyards. Note however that once it is assumed that the individual transect collections were limited to the number of finds counted during the quantification campaign, the variations in artifact densities between field blocks is less dramatic and most of the sectors belong to the zone of average density. Only in the northern end of sector VII, at a distance of about 1200 meters from the village, does the carpet of Late Ottoman-Early Modern finds become sparser, featuring consistently below 5 fragments per 1000 sq meters.

The last survey sector where the transect survey recorded artifact densities higher than the survey's average was sector VI, on the valley floor. In this part of the survey area there is an

apparent difference between the sector's northern and southern half. On field blocks in the lower part of the valley situated below the modern village, the density of the Late Ottoman-Early Modern material usually exceeds the mean overall value and on one field unit, we recorded nearly 5 fragments per 100 sq meters or over 25 fragments per 100 sq meters, in case all counted finds were collected (maps III_46b and 46d). As in sector VII, there are considerable variations in land-use between the neighbouring field units. On the field blocks north of the Skopje-Thessalonica highway the density of Late Ottoman-Early Modern finds suddenly plummets well below the mean overall value, even on cultivated fields. These fields lie at approximately equal distance from the village as the field blocks in sector VII, but they are more difficult to access and agricultural exploitation is less intensive.

Predictably the quantity of the Late Ottoman-Early Modern material is even lower in sectors east of the central valley, as well as in sectors I and XI (maps III_46c and 46e). On field blocks in these peripheral parts of the survey area, the artifact density rarely exceeds the limit of 5 fragments per 1000 sq meters. Large sections in sectors IX, X and XI are completely sterile. As in the rest of the survey area, off-site debris from the last couple of centuries was mostly discovered on cultivated fields.

Thus in general the transect survey records point to two zones concerning the dispersal of the Late Ottoman-Early Modern material. One characterized by artifact densities close to or higher than the mean overall value of 10 fragments per 1000 sq meters is clearly limited to Sopot's inner agricultural territory, the southern and eastern foothills of Prisoj. It extends for a maximum of 1 kilometer from the village centre in a northeast direction, along the western bank of the valley. In the other directions its dispersal is limited by topographic barriers: the steep slopes of Prisoj to the north and the V-shaped valleys and ravines to the west and east. Although the southern tip of the Ramnište Ridge is closer to the village than field blocks in the northern end of sector VII, it is more difficult to access, a factor that certainly played a decisive role in the distribution of field manure¹⁵⁴. The other zone characterized by an ultra-thin and discontinuous carpet features a maximum density of 5 fragments per 1000 sq meters. More commonly however, field units feature not more than 1-2 shards per 1000 sq meters. This zone is spread over the peripheral parts of the studied landscape. These fields lie at distances greater than 1 kilometer or are less accessible from the village and cultivation is less intensive. We believe that such extremely low amounts of material datable to the last couple of centuries can be expected even in the most peripheral parts of all landscapes inhabited by stable agricultural communities.

Despite the seemingly random fluctuations between neighbouring fields (table 31, Appendix II), the spatial distribution of the Late Ottoman-Early Modern finds in the survey area features a roughly concentric pattern. Emerging from the site of the modern village, these finds form a continuous carpet, covering the entire western half of the survey and the floor of the small valley. In the eastern survey sectors and along the upper course of the central valley, their quantity sharply decreases, but they are still present on the surface. This pattern can be linked to two closely related factors; distance and topographic configuration and to the type and intensity of land-use¹⁵⁵. The former factor or the accessibility of the fields certainly determines the overall concentric pattern of distribution, while the localized variations between neighbouring field units

¹⁵⁴ P. Howard, Spatial analysis of Boeotia field-walking survey data, 111-128, eds. J. Bintliff, P. Howard, A. Snodgrass, 2007.

¹⁵⁵ P. Howards, 120-124, J.L. Bintliff, P. Howard, A.M. Snodgrass, 2007.

must be related to the differences in land-use, the varying strategies and wealth of individual farmers and the type of cultures grown¹⁵⁶.

In general we see a striking parallel to the infield-outfield system of cultivation known from historical sources and from intensive surface surveys of rural sites in Greece and the Near East¹⁵⁷. The nearer and denser off-site zone marks the most intensively cultivated fields in the immediate vicinity of the village (III_map 45). Depending on the topography and the distribution of soils, it extends for between 500 meters to 1 km from the village centre. The cultures grown on these fields include gardens, vines and certain sorts of wheat. The local farmers regarded them as their most highly prized possessions and during the course of fieldwork we observed that much care was devoted in tending these fields. The outer off-site carpet coincided with the zone of outfield agriculture, but also with abandoned fields or fields with poorer soils. These fields are planted with less labour demanding cultures, such as barley or rye and are often left fallow every second year. Therefore the bringing of manure was probably deemed unnecessary by the local farmers, resulting in only sporadic finds that gave the low densities of 1-2 fragments per 1000 sq meters or a few fragments per field block¹⁵⁸. Understandably other mechanisms could also contribute to the presence of off-site material, including casual loss, outdoor activities or special-purpose sites. But the extensive and relatively structured carpet of surface material produced during the last couple of centuries must have been created through a prolonged and intensive process, such as the regular bringing of manure interspersed with household debris on the fields. Casual loss or non-residential activities could only have played a very minor part in the formation of this layer of surface material. Hence the density of the Late Ottoman-Early Modern off-site carpet is a good indicator of the character and intensity of agricultural exploitation across various parts of the surveyed landscape.

Analyzing the presence of the basic functional categories in the collections of Late Ottoman-Early Modern material, we pointed to the large amount of architectural ceramics, mostly small-format, roof tile fragments (graph 24, Appendix II). They comprised around one half of the assemblage and their share in the off-site record even rose to over 60% in the more peripheral parts of the landscape. This is contrary to the suggestion that brick and tile are the least likely ceramic categories to find their way in the loads of manure carried to the fields¹⁵⁹. Admittedly this suggestion pertains to the period of Antiquity, but the arguments presented also apply to the Late Ottoman-Early Modern Period. Tile was present in such quantities in the off-site record that recycling is very unlikely. It is possible that this prominence of roof-tile fragments even on the more distant fields signals a change in material culture standards. Except for a few ruined buildings, the old traditional roof tiles cannot be seen on the roofs of standing village houses. They are replaced by industrially produced tile and non-ceramic materials.

It is clear that the Late Ottoman and Early Modern settlement is a direct successor of the pre-19th century village mentioned in the written sources and located on the narrow terraces, about 100 meters to the west. Although there was a slight displacement, the two settlements occupied essentially the same location. In terms of the proximity to various resources, it is evident that the floor of the central valley and the Vardar were important for both communities. The chief difference between the locations of the Late Byzantine and Early Ottoman and the Late Ottoman and Early Modern village is that the latter is larger and more spacious. Indeed

¹⁵⁶ H. Forbes, 168-169, ed. R. Jones, 2012.

¹⁵⁷ J.L. Bintliff, P. Howard, A.M. Snodgrass, 23-26, fig. 4.3, 2007; T.J. Wilkinson, 31-46, 1989.

¹⁵⁸ H. Forbes, 167, ed. R. Jones, 2012.

¹⁵⁹ D.K. Pettegrew, 199-200, 2001.

measuring from the 1950's map (maps III_42, 46a), it turns out that the area occupied by the Late Ottoman and Early Modern village is nearly 3 hectares or almost three times the area occupied by its Early Ottoman predecessor. In fact the need for space could be one of the causes for the displacement. However this casts a doubt over our earlier interpretations of the size of the Late Byzantine and Early Ottoman village. According to the Ottoman censuses for the year 1467-1468, 15th century Sopot is actually considerably larger than the 1930s village. Yet the distribution of the surface remains suggested that the Late Byzantine and Early Ottoman settlement occupied not more than 1 hectare.

Two possible explanations come to mind. It is firstly possible that Late Byzantine and Early Ottoman Sopot was a more dispersed settlement and that the survey only managed to capture its central quarters¹⁶⁰. The isolated farms and houses scattered across the surrounding fields would have left only faint surface remains, easily missed amidst the large amounts of material from several different periods. If this is the case, it would imply reinterpretation of the rank of earlier settlements as well, but also a significant increase in population during the Late and Post-Byzantine period. Recall that the area occupied by the houses and barns of the Late Ottoman and Early Modern village approaches the size of the Late Iron Age settlement. It also implies that the settlement remains that spread over an area of one hectare or less were of the rank of very small hamlets or even more likely, individual farms. But according to this reading of the data, it turns out that the large mound necropolis consisting of at least several dozen mounds was constructed by a larger hamlet or a small village.

The other explanation assumes that the expanding settlement area of the Late Ottoman and Early Modern settlement has more to do with changes in agricultural economy, vernacular architecture and also perhaps in social relations, rather than simply reflecting increased population. The impact of the wider introduction of American cultures during the late 18th and throughout the 19th century has never been assessed, but considering their importance in the 20th century agriculture, they probably brought certain changes in local agricultural production and nutrition. Specifically in this region, tobacco was more important, but garden products, especially peppers and tomato are also grown. These cultures are most commonly grown on small parcels within the house-yards or very close to the houses, which has certainly expanded the space between neighbouring houses. Another important factor was the gradual dissolution of the old *çiftlik* system and the appropriation of larger tracts of arable land by the Christian peasants. In the old *çiftlik* type of settlement, only the houses of the landowners had spacious yards, usually surrounded by tall walls. The peasant-serfs lived together with the animals in small, single storied houses, often built one next to other and leaning against the wall of the landowner's estate. By the beginning of the 20th century this type of settlement completely disappeared, at least from the regions along the upper Mid-Vardar. Two storied houses surrounded with separate yards have become the norm in many villages by the late 19th century¹⁶¹.

It seems more likely that it was these developments in local rural society and economy and the related changes in living standards that brought about the expansion of the area of the Late Ottoman and Early Modern village, rather than a supposed population increase during the 14th and 15th centuries. In terms of population size and basic subsistence, Late Ottoman and Early

¹⁶⁰ Cf. J. Bintliff, 469-470, 2012.

¹⁶¹ M.S. Filipović, 500-501, 1935; J. Cvijić, *Balkansko Polustrovo i Južnoslovenske Zemlje*, I, Beograd 1918. Identically organized *çiftlik* settlements existed in Greece, J. Bintliff, 459-460, 2012.

Modern Sopot differed little from its predecessor and from most other earlier settlements in the survey area.

III.2 Conclusions

III.2.1 History of habitation in the survey area in relation to the regional context and the major historical circumstances

As explained in the previous chapter, the survey area is an enclosed and well-defined micro-regional entity. It is one of the dozens small, lateral valleys draining directly into the Vardar. In the dry and hilly region of the Mid-Vardar, they present small oases of flat, cultivable land. The upper Mid-Vardar and particularly the stretch along the Taor Gorge lack larger, arable plains that could sustain larger communities. The nearest larger plains lie 10 and 15 kilometers to the south and east, the plain of Veles and the Ovče Pole Plateau. In such conditions one could predict that the small settlement niches in the rugged terrain of the upper Mid-Vardar were a secondary choice of habitat, occupied after the capacities of the larger basins were becoming fully exploited. Bearing in mind the present state of research of this kind, this will remain an untested hypothesis for a longer period of time. The existing archaeological data, mostly coming from small-scale excavations and extensive surveys rarely relates to issues such as settlement size, positioning in relation to the surrounding environment and are usually limited to certain time periods. As a consequence, it is rather difficult to compare them with the data from the Sopot survey, especially because quality and extent vary greatly across periods. Yet in order to obtain a fuller understanding of the developments in the survey area, it will be necessary to take into account the data available from the surrounding regions. Doubtless much more can be extracted from the published material in combination with targeted field surveys, but this by itself will require a separate study. Presently it will suffice to bring together the published data and shed a little light on the broader regional context, while summarizing the history of human settlement in the survey area.

The earliest remains of permanent human habitation in the surveyed valley date back to the 6th millennium BC, during the period of the Middle Neolithic. There were no traces of Early Neolithic occupation. This period is known from excavations in the Ovče Pole region, where a number of single and multi-phase settlements have been attested¹⁶². In regional archaeology, the Middle Neolithic is usually seen as a period of stabilization and expansion, though the dating is far from clear¹⁶³. The majority of the Neolithic sites from the Vardar Valley and the Skopje Basin are dated to the Middle and the Late Neolithic. Depending on the topography, these are settlements of the “tell” or tumba type, found in plains or open settlements, positioned on river terraces, in hilly regions. The Middle Neolithic settlement near Sopot was of the latter type. It was positioned on two river terraces, overlooking the turn of the central valley, near the geometric centre of the studied micro-region and the contact zone between the Tertiary and Quaternary sediments (map III_47).

¹⁶² M. Gimbutas et al. *Neolithic Macedonia* vol. I, Los Angeles 1976; M. Garašanin, *Centralnobalkanska zona* 82-106, ed. A. Benac *Praistorija Jugoslovenskih Zemalja* vol. II, Sarajevo 1979; M. Garašanin, 87-100, 1983.

¹⁶³ D. Zdravkovski, 56-57, 2008; D. Mitrevski, *Prehistory in FYRO Macedonia* 13-73, ed. D.V. Grammenos, *Recent research in the prehistory of the Balkans* Thessalonica-Athens 2003; V. Sanev et al. *Urgeschichte Makedoniens*, Skopje 1976.

There is an almost identically positioned, Middle and Late Neolithic settlement about 15 kilometers to the north¹⁶⁴. Situated on a terrace on the Vardar's right bank, it is surrounded by alluvial deposits. But it seems that the majority of the Early and Middle Neolithic sites have opted for the lighter lacustrine soils, covering the floors of all major basins in the country. At present the regions belonging to this geo-pedological zone have a rather dry and desolate appearance. This wasn't necessarily the case in the deeper past; in fact some of these plains were marshy until the middle of the last century. Their light soils were particularly well suited for hand cultivation¹⁶⁵. It should be stressed that this once fertile and lush plain was the setting for some of the earliest Neolithic settlements in the central parts of the Balkan Peninsula¹⁶⁶.

The second nearest known neighbour of the Middle Neolithic settlement near Sopot is situated about 15 kilometers to the east-northeast, deep into the Ovče Pole Plateau¹⁶⁷. It too is positioned on a terrace, possibly occupying an area of slightly over 1 hectare. 20 kilometers to the east of the Middle Neolithic site near Sopot is one of the earliest Neolithic settlements north of Thessaly and the eponymous site for the Anza cultural group¹⁶⁸. Again it is situated on a river terrace, at the contact zone between Quaternary colluvium and the vast sea of Neogene sediments. Back to the Vardar Valley, we already mentioned the Middle and Late Neolithic site at the northern end of the Taor Gorge. Unlike the settlements mentioned previously, it is focused on alluvial deposits, exploiting the wide river terraces of the Vardar just before it enters the Taor Canyon. Excavations on some of these sites have revealed that they were long-lived settlements, sometimes existing over a period of two millennia. For the regions south of Sopot and the Veles Basin, along the lower-mid Vardar Valley, information mostly comes from extensive surveys and the site locations are often very vaguely described¹⁶⁹. The nearest settlements are situated about 25 kilometers downstream from Sopot. Judging from the limited information, they too either occupied river terraces or were focused on the Tertiary lacustrine sediments, covering much of the regions along the lowerMid-Vardar. For the majority of settlements mentioned in the archaeological atlas, the chronology remains unclear (map III_48).

Thus the Middle Neolithic settlement near Sopot was part of an extensive network of roughly contemporary settlements featuring a similar positioning and similar size¹⁷⁰. It is near certain that we are only seeing a small part of the map of Neolithic settlements. The density of settlements at least in certain regions of the country must have approached the density observed in northern Greece. According to the scant data relating to their size, the sites discussed in the

¹⁶⁴M. Garašanin, G. Spasovska, Novi Iskopuvanja vo Zelenikovo kaj Skopje, 85-117, *Macedoniae Acta Archaeologica* 1 1976.

¹⁶⁵ In southern and central Greece the more stable, early farming communities are clearly concentrated on flood-plains or spring out-flow zones allowing for hoe cultivation with stone tools, J.L. Bintliff, E. Farinetti, 665-674, 2006; A. Sherratt, Water, soil and seasonality in early cereal cultivation, 313-330, *World Archaeology* 11, 1980; different tendencies have been observed in Thessaly with very dense regular grid of settlements occupying a wider range of geo-pedological units, C. Perlès, The distribution of Magoules in Eastern Thessaly, 42-56, ed. P. Halstead, *Neolithic society in Greece*, Sheffield 1999.

¹⁶⁶ M. Gimbutas ed. 283-286, 1976; M. Garašanin, 87-94, 1983.

¹⁶⁷ V. Sanev, Neolitskata naselba Rug-Bair kaj s. Gorobinci, 203-247, *Zbornik Narodni Muzej Štip* IV-V, 1976; M. Garašanin, 89, 1983.

¹⁶⁸ M. Gimbutas et al. 1976; V. Sanev et al. 24-26, 1976.

¹⁶⁹ Most information comes from the archaeological atlas, *Arheološka Karta na Republika Makedonija*, 60-85, vol. II, Skopje 1996.

¹⁷⁰ Similar but much denser patterns have been observed in parts of northern Greece, Thessaly and Macedonia, D. Grammenos ed. *Recent research in the prehistory of the Balkans* Thessalonica-Athens 2003; C. Perlès, *The early Neolithic in Greece: the first farming communities in Europe* 121-152, Cambridge 2001.

preceding paragraphs occupied between 1 and 3 hectares. It has to be stressed however that these estimates refer to the size of the terraces, rather than to the size of the sites themselves. Nevertheless if we assume that the site area was equal to the topographic unit occupied, it puts them alongside the Mid-Neolithic settlement near Sopot in the rank of small to medium sized villages. The settlement near Sopot was only slightly smaller, measuring nearly 0.9 hectares. It is therefore highly predictable that future intensive regional surveys will reveal more sites of similar size and possibly other higher or lower ranking site categories¹⁷¹.

In terms of population size, settlements measuring between 1 and 3 hectares were probably inhabited by between 80 and 300 inhabitants¹⁷². The Middle Neolithic settlement in Sopot was at the lower end of this range. This is not untypical even for later historic periods. As we saw in the first half of this chapter, in certain aspects the Middle Neolithic will lay the foundation for the local settlement pattern in later periods. During most of the history of habitation in the survey area, the local settlement will be of a similar rank and size, though its position will often shift considerably across the survey area. Later in this chapter we will try to examine if this continuity in the size of the local community is primarily related to demographic or environmental constraints.

It is finally interesting to note that despite their small size and rank, Neolithic settlements along the Vardar Valley often occupy very open and exposed locations. The settlement near Sopot is perhaps one of the more extreme examples. As explained it occupies a central position in the small valley, poorly defended and very close to the main local west-east transversal. In this aspect too, the Middle Neolithic Period sets the precedent for a number of other prehistoric settlements of similar size and rank, which occupied equally open and unprotected locations.

On most of the Neolithic settlements along the Vardar Valley and along its eastern tributaries life continued throughout the Late Neolithic, although a certain number of sites are known to have been abandoned towards the beginning of the 4th millennium BC. In the case of Sopot, the situation remains uncertain. The study of the pottery gathered recognized a separate assemblage, whose distribution mostly overlaps with the area of the Middle Neolithic site. These are doubtlessly the remains of a similarly sized settlement, exploiting the same resources as its predecessor. However it is uncertain if this is the direct successor of the Mid-Neolithic settlement or traces of a much later settlement. The problem arises from the character of the pottery, which is only vaguely related to the Mid-Neolithic production.

Unlike the Mid-Neolithic material, limited to the site area and the surrounding site-halo, small scatters of the undated pottery were found dispersed across the entire eastern bank of the surveyed basin, hundreds of meters from the site core. Lacking secure dates for this assemblage, it is impossible to offer a reasonable explanation for these scatters. The fact that these are isolated groups of small numbers of fragments perhaps indicates that they came from enclosed deposits and were not part of a continuous off-site carpet. The implications are that these are either the remains of isolated dwellings, burials or some sort of votive offerings (map III_49). Phenomena such as these are known, but from excavations on later period sites. In

¹⁷¹ A few years ago, rescue excavations along the newly built aqueduct channel east of Ovče Pole revealed a string of Neolithic settlements set at intervals of only a couple of kilometers, T. Jovčevska, Museum of Veles, personal communication.

¹⁷² Cf. J.C. Chapman, The early Balkan village, 33-53, *Varia Archaeologica Hungarica* 2, 1989; P. Halstead ed. *Neolithic society in Greece*, Sheffield 1999; C. Perlès, 173, 2001; for a synthesis see J. Bintliff, 55-56, 2012.

regional archaeology Late Neolithic sites are usually regarded as nucleated, although it has to be stressed that attention was rarely given to the areas surrounding the site core¹⁷³.

Regardless of the date of this assemblage, its distribution reflects a different attitude towards the physical surroundings. The occurrence of the abovementioned clusters of finds on several locations along the left bank of the valley, hundreds of meters from the site core marks the Ramnište Ridge as an integral part of the wider settlement area. This is the settlement's impact zone or in the terminology of Czech landscape archaeology, the settlement's area.¹⁷⁴ This will become the norm for the majority of later settlements in the survey area. Apart from the main concentration of finds marking the settlement, one often finds smaller clusters of contemporary material spread across the entire topographic unit on which the settlement was founded.

By the middle of the 4th millennium BC at the latest, the site of the Middle Neolithic settlement and the entire basin of Sopot were completely abandoned. Compared to the Neolithic, very little is known about the following Eneolithic Period, particularly in the regions along the Middle Vardar Valley. Not a single Eneolithic site is listed in the archaeological atlas for the regions of Veles and Ovče Pole. In general the transition from the Neolithic to the Eneolithic remains a complete mystery. It is nevertheless evident that most of the known Eneolithic sites, at least in the northern parts of the country, occupied completely different location types. For example, the two known Eneolithic sites in the Skopje Basin occupy low, but well defended hillocks, overlooking larger alluvial tracts, which offered access to fertile land and control over natural lines of communication¹⁷⁵. Globally this shift in the settlement focus away from the alluvial and lacustrine plains and onto the rugged, interfluvial zone has been related to the so called Secondary Products Revolution: introduction of milk and dairy products, wool, the introduction of ox-driven plough and more advanced molding techniques¹⁷⁶.

The complete abandonment of the Neolithic settlement pattern was also confirmed through excavations; the site of "Slatina", on the right bank of the Vardar, 15 kilometers north of Sopot was certainly abandoned by the middle of the 4th millennium BC, as were most of the tell-settlements in the Skopje Basin¹⁷⁷. In this respect the survey area fits well into the broader regional pattern.

Even more limited is the information about human settlement in the Middle Vardar during the Bronze Age. Most of the information comes from reconnaissance and contains only brief remarks about the locations of sites¹⁷⁸. Actually very little of this information is published, except for the short entries in the archaeological atlas (map III_50). Most problematic of all is

¹⁷³ Evidence for dispersed Late and even Middle Neolithic settlement has come from Lower Macedonia, though the very large size of these sites is incomparable to our example, K. Kotsakis, What tells can tell – social space and settlement in the Greek Neolithic, 66-76, ed. P. Halstead, 1999. Far more comparable examples come from distant Crete and Laconia, K. Branigan, Late Neolithic Colonization of the Uplands of Eastern Crete, 57-65, the same volume; W. Cavanagh, Joost Crouwel, 121-150, W. Cavanagh, J. Crouwel, R.W.V. Catling, G. Shipley et al., 2002.

¹⁷⁴ M. Kuna, M. Zvelebil, P. Foster, D. Dreslerová, Field survey and landscape archaeology research design: methodology of a regional field survey in Bohemia, 110-130, *Památky Archeologické* LXXXIV-2, 1993; E. Neustupný ed. 1998.

¹⁷⁵ B. Babić, I. Mikulčić, 162, 1967; R. Pašić, Gradište kao tip naselja u Skopskoj Kotlini, 145-153, *Materijali: Naseljavanje i naselja u praistoriji, X kongres arheologa Jugoslavije*, Prilep 1976.

¹⁷⁶ A. Sherratt, Plough and pastoralism: Aspects of the secondary products revolution, 261–305, eds. I. Hodder, G. Isaac, N. Hammond *Patterns of the past. Studies in honor of David Clarke*, Cambridge 1981.

¹⁷⁷ V. Sanev, 241, 1976a, M. Garašanin, G. Spasovska, 85, 1976.

¹⁷⁸ *Arheološka Karta na Republika Makedonija*, 65-80, 344-361, 1996.

the absence of a finer chronology. Apart from a small number of Late Bronze Age sites or sites dated to the period of transition between the Late Bronze and the Early Iron Age, the rest are simply dated to the Bronze Age. In effect one wonders if the Bronze Age sites listed in the archaeological atlas are actually contemporary. Following the chronology for the region of the Central Balkans, the Bronze Age begins around 3000 BC and lasts until 1200 BC¹⁷⁹.

Sometime during this long period of nearly two millennia, the survey area was reoccupied. The Bronze Age settlement was unlike the Middle-Neolithic and it was focused on the western end of the survey area. In fact, the major concentration of finds was discovered outside the limits of the Sopot Basin, on site 3. This site was situated on the floor of the Vardar Valley on its left bank, by the confluence with one of its smaller tributaries. It was a tiny establishment, spreading over an area of less than 1000 sq meters or ten times smaller than the Middle Neolithic settlement and its undated successor. This individual farm occupied a very different type of settlement niche. It is much smaller and better defined than the open ridges drained by the valley of Sopot.

The study of the material collected suggests that this was not the only site that could be broadly dated to the Bronze Age (map III_51). Faint traces of Bronze Age activity were also discovered on the later period sites 5a, 6 and 8. These locations are much more exposed and they are positioned in the midst of the most fertile and spacious stretch of land in the survey area, the foothills of Prisoj. The meager remains point to two significant changes in the local settlement during the Bronze Age. For the first time in the local history of habitation, the western bank was occupied, as well as the floor of the Vardar Valley. This shift in settlement focus is difficult to insert into a wider context, given the paucity of archaeological data and the very general chronology. One is tempted to view it as a belated effect of the advances in metallurgy, the so called Secondary Product Revolution and the introduction of animal traction¹⁸⁰. This allowed the farmers of the late 4th millennium BC to expand their agricultural territories outside valley bottoms and flood-plains and exploit difficult but fertile terrains¹⁸¹.

During most subsequent periods the main local settlement will always be situated in the western half of the basin, though not as close to the Taor Canyon as the Bronze Age farms. Also for the first time in this area, a fully dispersed type of settlement appears. Because of the small number of finds and the poor understanding of local and regional Bronze Age chronology, it remains unclear if these were contemporary farms, exploiting different parts of the landscape or if only one farm was active at a time. If the vestigial remains on site 6 and 8 truly belong to the Bronze Age, it reflects a careful dividing of the area, with settlement foci at intervals of 400-500 meters (map III_51).

This pattern of extreme dispersal explains why the Bronze Age is so poorly represented in the archaeological atlas¹⁸². The great majority of Bronze Age sites known from the regions of Skopje, Ovče Pole and Veles were found only thanks to the presence of later period remains. These sites show considerable diversity regarding the types of location they occupy. The majority were discovered on forts from later periods, which is doubtless related to the predominant method of field survey. But a few sites mostly found by accident were positioned

¹⁷⁹ W. Heurtely, *Prehistoric Macedonia*, Oxford 1939; V. Sanev et al, 29-30, 1976; A.F. Harding, *European Societies in the Bronze Age*, Cambridge 2000, especially 9-14; for the regions of the Central Balkans, the absolute chronologies is closer to that of Greece and the Aegean, although radiocarbon or dendro-chronological sequences are lacking.

¹⁸⁰ A. Sherratt, 261, eds. I. Hodder, G. Isaac, N. Hammond, 1981.

¹⁸¹ J.L. Bintliff, E. Farinetti, 665-667, 2006; for Greece in general, see J. Bintliff, 2012, chapters 3 and 4.

¹⁸² Cf. J. Bintliff, P. Howard, A. Snodgrass, 139-168, 1999.

on open terrain, close to streams. Unfortunately there is no mention of their size, either because only a small probe was opened or because of the multi-period character of the sites. In any case this type of open locations by streams was also occupied by the small farms found in the Sopot survey. The closest parallel comes from the shores of a small artificial lake, 5 kilometers southeast of Sopot¹⁸³ (map III_50). As in most other cases, the size was not documented, partly because the cluster of surface finds was covered by large amounts of Late Roman tile and pottery. Like the small farms near Sopot, it occupies an open terrain at the junction of two streams.

The Middle Neolithic and the Bronze Age settlement represent the two extreme modes of habitation in the survey area: a completely nucleated settlement, with no traces of off-site activities and a network of isolated farms, positioned at roughly equal distances. In most other time-periods, the local settlement will neither be completely nucleated, nor completely dispersed. It must be stressed however that the low chronological resolution prevents us from directly contrasting these two patterns. As mentioned in preceding paragraphs, it is impossible to know if all Bronze Age sites were actually contemporary or if the revealed pattern was created in successive stages of abandonment and relocation¹⁸⁴. The community that re-occupied the survey area during the Bronze Age was evidently smaller than the Middle Neolithic community or their successors on site 11. Even assuming that the revealed network of farms was contemporary and incomplete, their combined size would still be much smaller than the nucleated settlements on site 11. In fact low population could be the factor that allowed settlement dispersal to such a degree. During the Bronze Age each of the settlement foci occupied a separate micro-topographic unit, sufficiently large to sustain an extended family or a clan. On the other hand, the larger nucleated Mid-Neolithic settlement occupied a more exposed, central location giving access to various sections and resources in the studied landscape.

A small group of finds belonging to a single fabric group could be dated more narrowly to the Late Bronze Age. This is a problematic category because it appears alongside different assemblages, including the small Bronze Age assemblage on site 3, in the monastic complex. Isolated fragments were also found scattered across sites 7 and 8, but not on sites 5a and 6. It would be groundless to suggest any elaborate interpretation, as we don't know if this material represents a separate epoch or if it is a part of some larger assemblage. In any case, the distribution of these finds traces the way of future developments in the local settlement history. Obviously there was some activity on site 3, on the Vardar Valley floor, but the exposed southern foothills of Prisoj were completely abandoned. The majority of the finds of this group were collected from the more sheltered eastern foothills, 700-900 meters upstream from site 5a. This part of the landscape will become the most favored settlement location in the coming centuries (mapIII_52).

As in most other parts of the Balkan Peninsula and the Aegean, the period between 1200 and 800 BC is poorly understood. Interestingly almost all sites dated to these centuries are necropoleis. The few settlements dated to this period consist almost exclusively of hillocks fortified in the Hellenistic or the Late Roman Period¹⁸⁵. Particularly problematic is the chronology of the pottery material. Pottery production of the time retains many of the Late

¹⁸³ *Arheološka Karta na Republika Makedonija*, vol. II, 60-61, 1996.

¹⁸⁴ According to researchers working in Greece and the Aegean the latter was the likelier scenario, J. Bintliff, P. Howard, A. Snodgrass, 139-140, 1999; J.F. Cherry, 19, eds. C. Renfrew, M. Wagstaff, 1982.

¹⁸⁵ D. Mitrevski, *Protoistoriskite Zaednici vo Makedonija preku pogrebuvanjeto i pogrebnite običaj*, Skopje 1997; D. Mitrevski, 13-73, ed. D.V. Grammenos, 2003.

Bronze Age traditions and it is often difficult to distinguish between genuine Late Bronze Age material and the Early Iron Age retentions. In regional archaeology it is generally accepted that these were turbulent times, marked by instability and violent migrations. It has to be stressed though that these conclusions are mostly based on the evidence from excavations on sites in the Lower Vardar Valley¹⁸⁶.

In stark contrast to the scarcity of evidence from the surrounding regions, in the survey area settlement was returning to the pre-Bronze Age level. Two very different assemblages were dated to this period. The presumably earlier, featuring some typical Late Bronze Age characteristics, mostly came from site 7. Smaller, isolated clusters were collected from a wider area, stretching from Prisoj's eastern foot to the fields east of the modern village. It greatly resembled the distribution pattern of the possible Late Neolithic assemblage, spread on the opposite eastern bank. Site 7 is smaller than site 11, but the satellite clusters are more substantial and more numerous (map III_53). Moreover at least one or two clusters were almost certainly swamped by the much larger Late Iron Age cluster on site 8. Even if not all of these clusters were dwelling remains, it is evident that population increased during this period. A new nucleated settlement was established, approaching the rank of the Mid-Neolithic settlement and its successor on site 11.

The closest parallel comes from the lower Mid-Vardar, 30 kilometers south-southeast of Sopot¹⁸⁷. A site called "Stolot" near the village Ulanci is situated on a low flattened top and spreads over to a lower terrace of similar size, on the Vardar's left bank (map III_50). This is an old eroded terrace, cut by streams on the eastern and western side. It has an excellent control over the alluvial plain and a direct visual communication with Stobi, one of the main cross-roads in the region, also inhabited at the time. Excavations revealed traces of what is still considered the earliest stone architecture in the country. This was doubtless a site of some importance, but it barely measures 5000 sq meters, slightly larger than the central settlement near Sopot. 200 meters to the north, on a higher and similarly shaped plateau, the researchers found a highly organized necropolis, stretching over a distance of at least 60 meters. It was estimated that it contained about 100 cists. This fairly close proximity to the settlement indicates that at least some of the clusters surrounding site 7 were possibly necropolis remains. The problem lies in the much greater dispersal of the clusters documented by the Sopot survey in comparison to the communal necropolis near "Stolot".¹⁸⁸

It should be stressed that site 7 was a newly occupied location in the survey area. By the turn of the 1st millennium BC, all activity seems to have shifted to Prisoj's eastern foothills and the fields east of the village, closer to the western bank of the central valley. Not a single fragment was found west of the dirt-road leading north, along the right bank of the valley. Thus as in the case of the possible Late Neolithic settlement, the settlement's impact zone was limited to a single micro-topographic unit, Prisoj's eastern foothills. It is likely that apart from isolated dwellings and various outbuildings, this area also marks the most intensively cultivated part of the landscape. Interestingly the main concentration of finds on site 7 was located at the very edge of the dispersal area of this assemblage. Both this and the settlement on "Stolot" are located in the Vardar Valley, the main natural corridor linking the Aegean with the Central Balkans. It

¹⁸⁶ I. Mikulčić, 11, 1966; M., Garašanin, Contributions à la chronologie de l'âge du fer en Macédoine, 173-186, *Živa Antika* X 1-2, 1960, B. Hänsel, Kastanas. Die Grabung der Baubefund, *Prähistorische Archäologie im Südosteuropa*, Band 7-2, Berlin 1989; W. Heurtely, 217-218, 1939.

¹⁸⁷ D. Mitrevski 37-39, 44, 1997.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. 35-37.

should be stressed that most other known sites from this period are situated along major natural corridors, though this could merely reflect the better state of research in these regions¹⁸⁹.

If the adopted dating is correct, this was a relatively short-lived settlement. The first typically Iron Age finds were collected from two different sites at Prisoj's southern foot. Sometime during the first couple of centuries of the first millennium BC, sites 5a and 6 were reoccupied. The chronology of this material is not exactly determined. It is evidently very similar to the Late Iron Age fabrics and bears little resemblance to the assemblage collected from site 7. It is thus quite possible that there was a brief abandonment of the entire micro-region, towards the end of the II millennium BC¹⁹⁰. It seems that by the time Prisoj's southern foothills were reoccupied, site 7 was completely deserted, along with the entire eastern foothills. To a certain degree the Bronze Age pattern was restored, but the two clusters of Iron Age finds were much larger. Each occupies an area of about 4 000 sq meters. Individually they are smaller than site 7, but their combined areas are slightly larger, nearly equalling the size of site 11. As in the case of the Bronze Age farms, it is impossible to decide if the two settlements were contemporary or successive.

Another obvious characteristic of the Early Iron Age settlement is that there lack traces of satellite clusters. We were able to identify only a single satellite situated in-between the settlement sites and in addition, a few isolated finds were collected from the fields at the southern foot of Prisoj, east of site 6. In other words this period sees a return to a more nucleated pattern of settlement, similar to the Middle Neolithic. Because almost all finds datable to this period are confined within the site limits, it is difficult to determine the impact zone. Given that the central sites were truly contemporary settlements, it is likely that the settlement on site 5a exploited the area of the modern village and the fields to its west, while site 6, the eastern half of Prisoj's southern foothills (map III_54).

Unfortunately there lack comparative data from the surrounding regions of Veles, Ovče Pole and Skopje. The few known sites dated to the Early Iron Age are almost exclusively fortified hill-tops, while there is no mention of the existence of a corresponding necropolis¹⁹¹. On the other hand, only a few of the Late Iron Age mound necropoleis have burials earlier than 800 BC¹⁹².

While it remains uncertain if population remained stable or slightly dwindled during the first two centuries of the first millennium BC, it is clear that there was absolutely no continuity with the settlement at Prisoj's eastern foot. There was not only a dramatic shift in settlement location, but also greater nucleation of settlement and an almost complete break with earlier pottery production. This development doesn't contradict the generally accepted view of the historical conditions at the time. According to many scholars, this is the period of the Great Migrations and the surveyed area being situated by one of the main interregional corridors would have certainly felt the impact of the supposed large-scale invasions. Similar drastic changes in

¹⁸⁹ D. Mitrevski, 45, 1997; I. Mikulčić 9-10, 1966.

¹⁹⁰ Some authors tend to date similarly described material slightly later, towards the 9th and the 8th centuries BC. Z. Georgiev, Basarabi stilot i Makedonija 81-96, *Macedoniae Acta Archaeologica* 13, 1992; J. Stankovski, Tumulot I od tumularnata nekropola kaj s. Strnovac, opština Staro Nagoričino, 135-153, *Macedoniae Acta Archaeologica* 18, 2008.

¹⁹¹ B. Georgievski, Praistoriski gradišta od kumanovsko 51-68, *Macedoniae Acta Archaeologica* 13, 1992.

¹⁹² D. Mitrevski 71-81, 1997.

pottery production have been observed on excavated sites in the Lower Vardar, in layers dated around the turn of the millennium¹⁹³.

There are two main reasons to be reserved about this scenario. Firstly, unlike in Kastanas or Wardarofca (Axiochorion) the chronology of the finds from the Sopot survey is far from clear. The assemblages from sites 5a and 6 are barely determined as earlier than the securely dated Late Iron Age assemblage from site 8 and later than the assemblage on site 7. Little else can be done at present, as only future research can help establish a more refined chronology. Secondly, we saw that dramatic shifts in settlement locations occurred even during relatively peaceful and prosperous periods. One always has to bear in mind that these were fairly small communities, which could easily abandon their old settlement sites in the face of local events and processes. In fact even in the heart of the Mycenaean territory it is difficult to link the destruction layers on the major palatial centres to discrete historical or environmental events¹⁹⁴.

Towards the end of the 9th century BC there sets in a longer period of stability in most regions of the Balkan Peninsula, along the Danube and in the Eastern Mediterranean¹⁹⁵. Locally it is known as the “Developed” or the Late Iron Age¹⁹⁶. The term “developed”, actually reflects the view that by this time, a distinct local culture was established, with its own characteristic pottery production, metallurgy and burial rites. Although some of the Late Bronze Age traditions survived, the pottery of the 7th and 6th century BC is much easier to distinguish than material from the Dark Ages. Most of the larger settlements often continuing their existence into the Hellenistic and Roman Period were established by the time of the Late Iron Age. As elsewhere this is a much better understood period.

The first excavations on the Late Iron Age sites date back to the 1950's¹⁹⁷. However this is greatly assisted by the fact that the predominant type of burial rite during the Late Iron Age was under mounds. Usually they are not particularly large, but because they appear in groups, often on deliberately chosen and exposed locations, they were easily spotted during the first regional archaeological surveys in the 1950's and 1960's. Since then much has been learned about the burial rites and other aspects of the Late Iron Age material culture, but almost no progress has been made in the study of settlements and settlement patterns. In fact for most mound necropoleis, including the one in the survey area, the locations of the corresponding settlements were unknown. Due to the prevailing survey method, the known settlements from

¹⁹³ W. Heurtely, 98-99, 217-218, 1939; A. Hochstetter, Kastanas: die Handgemachte Keramik 276-283, *Prähistorische Archäologie in Südosteuropa*, Band 3, Berlin 1984.

¹⁹⁴ O. Dickinson, *The Aegean from Bronze Age to Iron Age, continuity and change between the 12th and 8th century BC*, London-New York 2006.

¹⁹⁵ R. Vasić, *Kulturne grupe starijeg gvozdenog doba u Jugoslavii*, Belgrade 1973; A.M. Snodgrass, *The Dark Age of Greece*, Edinburgh 1971; O. Dickinson, 98, 216-217, 2006.

¹⁹⁶ In this study we followed the periodization proposed by D. Mitrevski 1997; D. Mitrevski, Prilog kon poznavanju na Donovardarskata-Paionska grupa na Železnoto Vreme 145-159, *Macedoniae Acta Arhaeologica* 12, 1990-1991, in the broader context of the central Balkans, this is Iron Age II, R. Vasić, Gevgeliska grupa starijeg Gvozdenog Doba, 637-38, ed. A. Benac, *Praistorija Jugoslovenskih Zemalja V*, Sarajevo 1987; M. Garašanin, 173-186, 1960.

¹⁹⁷ M. Garašanin, D. Garašanin, Arheološka iskopavanja u selu Radanju, kod lokaliteta “Krivi Dol” 9-61, *Zbornik na Štipskiot Narodni Muzej I*, 1959; I. Mikulčić, Izveštaj sa probnog iskopavanja halštatske nekropole kod s. Star Karaorman 95-112, *Zbornik na Štipskiot Narodni Muzej I*, 1959; V. Sanev, Mogilite of Kunovo Čuki kaj s. Orizari-Kočansko, 7-27, *Zbornik na Arheološkiot Muzej VIII-IX*, 1978.

this period almost exclusively consist of fortified hillocks¹⁹⁸. It is somewhat paradoxical that this type of Iron Age sites is completely absent from the regions featuring higher concentrations of mound necropoleis; even if present, they were almost never related to a nearby mound necropolis.

Looking at the distribution of mound necropoleis and hill-forts in the regions of Veles and Ovče Pole, it is possible to get some idea about the density and distribution of the Late Iron Age settlements, although we can only speculate about their size and exact location (map III_55). It has to be stressed that this information mostly comes from extensive surveys, which is to a great extent problematic, because of the re-introduction of mound burials during the Roman Period. The latter can be distinguished by their construction and much greater size, but due to the fact that the majority of these mounds have suffered greatly from agricultural activity, one needs to be cautious with the chronology proposed in the survey reports or in the archaeological atlas. Finally, it has to be stressed that mound burials were not the sole type of funerary rite during the Late Iron Age. By the 6th century BC, skeletal burial in flat necropoleis became the norm for the regions of Pelagonia and the Lower Vardar Valley, but they also sporadically appear in the areas of the Middle Vardar and the Bregalnica¹⁹⁹. Mound burials are also conspicuously absent from the Upper Vardar, despite the great similarities with the region of the Middle Vardar in other aspects of the burial rite and material culture in general.

The mound necropolis near Sopot has been securely dated to the 7th and 6th century BC. The material excavated during the 1980's finds very close parallels among the material from earlier excavations on the mound necropoleis along the Bregalnica River, the largest eastern tributary of the Vardar²⁰⁰. These sites are located 40-45 kilometers east of Sopot, as the crow flies. However, similarly constructed mounds have been registered on a number of sites in the intervening regions. At least three separate mound necropoleis have been documented along the eastern edge of the Ovče Pole Plateau and at least a couple in the region to the north²⁰¹. Further west, in the central parts of the plateau, they become scarcer. Only isolated mounds are reported in the archaeological atlas²⁰². The next mound necropolis to the west is much more similar to the Sopot necropolis, consisting of a larger number of smaller mounds, constructed entirely of rounded stones. It is situated less than 8 km northeast of the mound necropolis near Sopot, in the hilly region separating the Veles Plain and the Ovče Pole Plateau, along its western edge²⁰³. Though the exact location of the settlement remains unknown, the surrounding landscape is very similar to the Sopot Basin. This is a minor stream that presently drains into a small, artificial lake, 5 kilometers southeast of Sopot. It is one of the typical settlement niches that dot the region of the Middle Vardar.

¹⁹⁸ I. Mikulčić, 17-35, 1982; Z. Georgiev, Tri pred-rimski naselbi kraj Pčinja 91-101, *Godišen Zbornik na Filozofski Fakultet* 17-18, 1990-1991; B. Georgievski, Praistoriski gradišta od kumanovsko 51-68, *Macedoniae Acta Archaeologica* 13, 1992.

¹⁹⁹ Z. Georgiev, Praistoriski naodi od Kočani i prašanje na ramnite nekropoli po Bregalnica 65-79, *Godišen Zbornik na Filozofski Fakultet* 7, 1981; D. Mitrevski, 146, 1997.

²⁰⁰ Gj. Petački, 71, 1986; D. Mitrevski 86-93, 1997.

²⁰¹ *Arheološka Karta na Republika Makedonija*, vol. II, 204-224, 344-362, 1996.

²⁰² Although isolated mounds are more typical for the Roman Period, one should allow the possibility that only meager traces survived from the original group. There are a number of examples of completely levelled mound necropoleis from the Iron Age, but in most cases, they consisted of a smaller group of several to a dozen mounds; D. Mitrevski, 90-91, 1997.

²⁰³ *Arheološka Karta na Republika Makedonija*, vol. II, 77 1996.

Apart from the mound necropolis near Sopot, Iron Age mounds are rare along the Vardar Valley. Only three sites are mentioned in the archaeological atlas for the entire Veles Region, all three being isolated mounds²⁰⁴. In contrast the mound necropolis near Sopot consists of nearly 100 mounds, approaching the size of some of the large necropoleis in the Bregalnica Valley²⁰⁵. It is very unlikely that this is a simple result of better preservation. Rather this seems to indicate the greater rank and size of the Late Iron Age centre near Sopot, but primarily its slightly later date²⁰⁶. Earlier mound necropoleis tend to consist of not more than several mounds. The individual mounds are larger and display a more formal and elaborate construction. It has been pointed out both by scholars working in the country and in the region that these tendencies of popularization and simplification of the sepulchral ritual reflect profound changes in social relations²⁰⁷. Specifically in the Republic of Macedonia, they have been related to the gradual demise of the old social order based on strict division into clans and lineages²⁰⁸.

A further problem in judging the significance of Late Iron Age Sopot in a regional context is the existence of a number of sites with flat necropoleis. Some of these are partly contemporary with the mound necropolis near Sopot and they evidently belonged to larger settlement centres. Such is the case of Byla Zora, the later Paionian capital, situated less than 20 kilometers east of Sopot, in the centre of the Ovče Pole Plateau. It's been justly observed that this divergence in burial customs during the 7th and the 6th century within a relatively small region reflects socio-cultural, rather than chronological or regional differences²⁰⁹. The mound burials near Sopot keep the old Iron Age tradition, while the cist burials in flat necropoleis pave the way for future developments. It is surely indicative that the majority of the known mound necropoleis are concentrated in hilly and peripheral regions. Both Sopot and its nearest neighbour to the east, as well as the supposed centres along the eastern edge of Ovče Pole belong to small, lateral drainage basins. The excavated mound necropoleis on the left bank of the Bregalnica belong to similar landscapes. On the other hand, the central parts of the Ovče Pole Plateau or the Veles Basin, either lack major mound necropoleis or lack any remains from the Late Iron Age.

Historical evidence pertaining to this period is rather scanty, but compared to earlier periods, we have some notion about the people that inhabited the regions along the Vardar Valley and about the political and economic relations with their neighbours. Although the earliest direct historical sources date to the 5th century BC, it is possible to infer some conclusions about the situation in the preceding centuries. Thus the archaeological findings from the 7th and 6th centuries are the earliest that can be put into a historical context²¹⁰.

²⁰⁴ *Arheološka Karta na Republika Makedonija*, vol. II, 77, 79-80, 84.

²⁰⁵ I. Mikulčić, 95-103, 1959; M. Garašanin, D. Garašanin, 9-51, 1958-1959.

²⁰⁶ The salvage excavation on the mound necropolis near Sopot was limited to its southern end, but the researchers were rather confident that the entire necropolis dates to the 7th-6th century. D. Mitrevski, 107, 1997; Đ. Petački, personal communication.

²⁰⁷ I. Morris, *Burial and Ancient Society: the rise of the Greek city-state*, Cambridge 1987; O. Dickinson, 174-177, 2006.

²⁰⁸ I. Mikulčić, 61-62, 1966; D. Mitrevski, 106-107, 1997; it has to be pointed out though that although larger, the earlier mounds could hardly provide enough burial space for the communities that built the later mound necropoleis, such as the one near Sopot. A likelier explanation is that during this early phase, the privilege of mound burial was limited only to a very narrow section of society.

²⁰⁹ D. Mitrevski, 103-105, 1997.

²¹⁰ D. Mitrevski, 72-73, 1997; E. Petrova, *Paeonia*, 3-26, Skopje 1999.

The mound necropoleis, like all other remains datable to the Late Iron Age have been related to the Paionian tribes²¹¹. There are a number of historical records relating the Paeonians with the territory of the present-day Republic of Macedonia. A later historical source from the Hellenistic Period mentions that future Paionian kings performed ritual bathing in the river Breglanica prior to their crowning²¹². But much earlier sources also clearly point to the Vardar Valley and the Pelagonian Plain as the home of the Paionian tribes²¹³. The Paionians were an important political factor in the regions of the central and southern parts of the Balkan Peninsula. Sometime in the sixth century BC, they were organized enough to lay siege to Perinthos, on the east Thracian Coast²¹⁴. There were also intensive political and trade relations with the Greek city-states, both in mainland Greece and in Asia Minor. Certain Paionian tribes are known to have minted silver coins, using Hellenic standards²¹⁵. Silver and wood were most probably the main export goods, the Vardar certainly playing an important role in the trade. Another testimony for the close relations (probably trading) with the Hellenic world is a series of peculiar bronze pendulums, discovered as votive offerings at the sanctuaries in Delphi and Olympia, in the mid decades of the last century²¹⁶. Although lying at its very edge, Paionia was an integral part of the Aegean and this seems to have been established by the time of the Late Bronze Age, at the latest²¹⁷.

The much larger number of known Late Iron Age sites can't be solely explained through research bias or their better state of preservation compared to remains of earlier prehistoric periods. There is an evident expansion, both in numbers and in monumentality of the sites, in most regions along the Vardar and its tributaries²¹⁸. Essentially the Sopot survey confirmed these developments on a micro-regional level. The Late Iron Age settlement was at least 3.5 times larger than the possible Late Neolithic hamlet, the second largest settlement in the surveyed area and almost 4 times larger than its Early Iron Age predecessor. This near quadrupling of size was accompanied by a radical shift in the settlement focus. For the second time, the focus of settlement moved from Prisoj's southern foothills to the west bank of the valley, at Prisoj's eastern foot. As in the case of the assemblages from most other periods, the Late Iron Age finds were found outside the narrower site area, either isolated or in small clusters. But for the first time we find them spread over most of the western half of the valley. Smaller clusters were found even on sites 5a and 6, suggesting that these earlier settlement locations were not completely abandoned (map III_56). The mound necropolis, stretching almost along the entire length of the easternmost ridge drained by the valley of Sopot completes the local Late Iron Age landscape. It further illustrates the expansion of settlement during the Late Iron Age. The entire lower half of the basin was clearly demarcated, its natural limits coinciding with the territory of the local community.

It has to be admitted that the Late Iron Age doesn't appear as a simple episode of local settlement expansion. This settlement is of a completely different rank and scale, unprecedented in the local history of human habitation. Although covered only by extensive surveys, it is

²¹¹ D. Mitrevski, 187-188, 1997; E. Petrova, 47-50, 1999.

²¹² E. Petrova, 20, 1999 (Polyaen IV-12, 31).

²¹³ E. Petrova, 3, 1999, Iliad X, 428-429

²¹⁴ E. Petrova, 6, 1999, Herodotus V, 1.

²¹⁵ E. Petrova, 93-97, 1999.

²¹⁶ E. Petrova, 21, 1999.

²¹⁷ D. Mitrevski, New aspects on the Bronze Age sites on the northern periphery of the Mycenaean World, 449-457, ed. B. Hänsel, *Man and environment in the European Bronze Age*, Kiel 1998.

²¹⁸ D. Mitrevski 72, 1997.

difficult to suspect that there are similarly-sized mound necropoleis in the neighbouring micro-regions, still awaiting their discovery. If this is taken as a measure of its social and demographic rank, Late Iron Age Sopot clearly stood apart from its immediate neighbours. While in most other periods of the past, the survey area was alternately occupied by small farms and hamlets or completely abandoned, the Late Iron Age brought local settlement to the rank of a medium-sized village. If the proposed interpretation of the survey results is correct and given that a settlement between 15 and 30 households occupies an area of about one hectare, a settlement area of at least 3.6 hectares could accommodate between 60 and 90 households²¹⁹.

This can also be inferred from the summarily published results of the excavations on the mound necropolis. Although smaller than those on earlier necropoleis, each of these mounds contained between 3 and 7 graves and many featured reuse of earlier graves or later interments, dug into the tumular mass after the mound construction was completed²²⁰. This evidence of frequent reopening of the mounds and modifications of the original construction indicates that the necropolis didn't expand. If credit is given to the claims that the entire necropolis consisted of nearly a hundred mounds, it is very likely that it belonged to a settlement far more substantial than its predecessors²²¹. Even though the tumular necropolis near Sopot belongs to the later group of larger necropoleis, featuring smaller and simpler mounds, it is very unlikely that the right of mound burial was granted to all sections of society²²². If this was the case, the supposed 100 mounds could accommodate not more than 2, 2.5 generations, even if we assume that each mound contained up to 10 burials²²³. An alternative explanation is that the community was smaller consisting of about 40-50 households, all members being given the right to mound burial. But the thick ritual layer discovered in the tumular mass and surrounding the individual graves points to elaborate funerary rites. It is difficult to accept that such ceremonies were carried out for all members of the local community. Because of the size of the settlement revealed through surface artifact survey and because of the ideological connotations surrounding funerary mounds, we believe that the right to formal burial on the necropolis was reserved only for certain sections of society and that the total population size is greater than suggested by the extent and the hypothetical capacity of the mound necropolis.

Late Iron Age Sopot was both quantitatively and qualitatively different from the farms and hamlets of the Late Bronze-Early Iron Age or the Middle Neolithic. The suggested figure of between 60 and 90 households roughly equals a population range of 300-450. This is certainly a very dramatic increase from earlier periods. In the concluding section we'll see that even a population of slightly over 150 can cause problems in maintaining social relations on a face-to-face basis. This implies that the Late Iron Age community near Sopot featured some form of

²¹⁹ Estimating population on the basis of settlement size is still regarded as highly problematic, not least because of variations across different regions and periods, different economic and social backgrounds, J.L. Bintliff, Further considerations on the population of ancient Boeotia, 231-252, ed. J. Bintliff, *Recent Developments in the History and Archaeology of Central Greece*, Oxford 1997; see also the excursus on the rural population in the southern hinterland of Thespias, J. Bintliff, P. Howard, A. Snodgrass, 144-145, 2007; for other regions in Greece, W. Cavanagh, J. Crouwel, R.W.V. Catling, G. Shipley et al. 133, 147, 205-211, 2002; M.H. Jameson et al. 539-567, 1994; for a critical overview see R. Osborne, *Demography and survey*, 63-72, eds. J.F. Cherry, S.E. Alcock, *Side – by – side survey: comparative regional studies in the Mediterranean World*, Oxford 2004.

²²⁰ D. Mitrevski, 92-94, 1997.

²²¹ D. Mitrevski, 92, 1997.

²²² I. Morris, 61-62, 1987.

²²³ This is not very realistic however, because the excavations showed that in certain mounds only half of the available space was used; D. Mitrevski, fig. 24, 1997; unfortunately the salvage excavations on the mound necropolis still await their proper publication.

horizontal, if not vertical stratification²²⁴. It is possible that these social arrangements are actually reflected in the organization of the mound necropoleis, with separate clusters of between several and a dozen mounds. One is tempted to suggest that the mound necropolis was used exclusively by the local leading clans, competing for prestige through the construction of higher, more massive mounds and performing lavish funerary feasts.

The terminal date of this settlement remains unknown. In most regions of the Vardar Valley, settlements established during the Iron Age continue their existence at least until the late 4th century BC²²⁵. There are apparent and significant changes in many aspects of culture and society during the following two centuries. Excavations on the majority of the mound necropoleis indicate that this burial rite was almost completely abandoned by the middle of the 5th century BC²²⁶. In many cases however, the Iron Age necropoleis continued to be in use until the Hellenistic Period. On some necropoleis the newly introduced rite of cremation was combined with small mound-like constructions, while on flat necropoleis, cists built in the 6th centuries were emptied of their contents and reused, the old relics carefully placed in the corner of the cist²²⁷. All of this indicates that on most known sites there was a strong continuity from the Late Iron Age through the Late Archaic and Classical Periods. Although insufficient the survey and excavation data pertaining to settlements of this period, also confirm that life went on uninterrupted on most known settlements in the Vardar Valley.

There are no reasons to believe that the large settlement near Sopot contradicted this pattern. The absence of the characteristic Hellenized shapes and decorative techniques among the pottery finds could rather reflect the strong, conservative character of the local tradition of pottery production, but also reduced contacts with the south and perhaps a certain decline in importance of the old tribal centre. Given the large number of different fabric groups collected from site 8, it is quite possible that the settlement on site 8 continued its existence at least into the 5th century BC, though its exact size and relation to its predecessor remains an unknown.

Research has so far revealed that the regions along the Upper and the Lower Vardar experienced divergent socio-historical developments after the late 4th century BC. Most of the sites known from the regions of Skopje and Polog, as well as from further north in the Morava Basin, were certainly abandoned by this time²²⁸. Survey and excavation data confirm that these were substantial and wealthy settlements, maintaining close relations with the Aegean²²⁹. All of this came to a sudden end by the late 4th century BC. Sites from the Hellenistic Period are very rare in the regions of Skopje or the Pologs and the local Hellenistic material is almost completely

²²⁴J. Bintliff, *Settlement and territory, 505-545*, ed. G. Barker, *Routledge Companion Encyclopedia of Archaeology*, London 1999.

²²⁵V. Sokolovska, 1986; I. Mikulčić, *Topografija na Stenae-Prosek-Demir Kapija* 65-78, *Godišen Zbornik na Filozofski Fakultet* 15, 1988-1989; D. Mitrevski et al. 2005; www.tafhr.org information on both, Vardarski Rid and Byla Zora.

²²⁶D. Mitrevski 146-151, 1997.

²²⁷I. Mikulčić, 197-209, 1965; Z. Georgiev, *Karakterot i značenjeto na vongrobnite naodi vo južnopovardarskite nekropoli od Železno Vreme*, 37-53, *Macedoniae Acta Archaeologica* 6, 1980; S. Karpuzova, N.P. Pecovska, *Iskopuvanje vo selo Korešnica-Demir Kapija*, 77-86, *Macedoniae Acta Archaeologica* 14, 1996.

²²⁸This was confirmed both through excavations and extensive surveys; I. Mikulčić, M. Jovanović, *Helenistički opidum u Krševici, kod Vranja* 355-375, *Vranjski Glasnik* IV, 1968; I. Mikulčić, 20, 1982; V. Sokolovska, 26, 1986.

²²⁹I. Mikulčić, V. Sokolovska, *Grobnicata vo Brazda, kaj Skopje* 79-92, *Macedoniae Acta Archaeologica* 11, 1990; It came as a great surprise when a small-scale excavation on a site in the South Morava Valley, 300 km north of the Bay of Thessalonica produced evidence of Red Figured pottery, antefixes, and classical jewelry; I. Mikulčić, M. Jovanović, 355-56, 1968.

unrelated to earlier traditions or to the material culture of the deeply Hellenized regions in the southern parts of the country. In contrast to the situation in the north, life continued during the Hellenistic Period on the majority of larger sites established in earlier centuries, along the Middle and the Lower Vardar, along the Bregalnica and in the Pelagonian Plain. But here too, it is possible to observe certain changes in the settlement pattern²³⁰. Specifically in the regions of the Mid-Vardar Valley and on the Ovče Pole Plateau a number of new settlements were established or gained greater importance. The mentioned Paionian capital of Byla Zora, dominating the Ovče Pole Plateau continues to flourish²³¹. On the other hand there is very little evidence coming from the areas with a greater concentration of mound necropoleis during the Late Iron Age, probably indicating decline and contraction. The earliest substantial habitation levels from Stobi also date to the Hellenistic Period²³². Further north along the Vardar, two new centres emerge. There were no excavations or systematic surveys on these sites, but there is clear evidence of occupation during this period²³³. One is situated about 15 kilometers to the north of Stobi, on the Vardar's right bank, the other, another 15 kilometers further upstream, on the southern shore of the artificial lake, less than 5 kilometers southeast of Sopot (map III_57). Unlike the older Late Iron Age centres, these new settlements occupy very exposed, central locations, controlling key communication routes, but also larger tracts of fertile land. They are either focused on the alluvial soils along the Vardar Valley or on the lacustrine sediments of the larger basins. It is difficult to accept the view that the hilly, peripheral drainage basins were completely abandoned, but they certainly lost their importance by the late 4th century BC. Archaeological remains of a more monumental character will return to these areas only in the Late Roman Period, although as the survey results showed, they weren't completely abandoned. Similar tendencies have been observed in the Pelagonian Plain and in the regions along the Bregalnica²³⁴.

The divergent developments in the northern and southern parts of the country and the changing settlement dynamics in the regions along the Middle and the Lower Vardar, the Ovče Pole Plateau and the Pelagonian Plain are usually related to the known historical circumstances during the 3rd and 2nd century BC²³⁵. The sudden disappearance of the Hellenized centres in the regions of the Upper Vardar Valley towards the end of the 4th century is commonly explained through a number of related demographic processes²³⁶. The main event marking the beginning of this period is the appearance of the Celts on the Mid-Danube and the subsequent invasions of the Greek mainland. Historical sources confirm that both Paionia and Macedonia were overrun and plundered on the way. This major destabilization was accompanied by two related demographic

²³⁰ The most detailed evidence still comes from the Pelagonian Plain, I. Mikulčić, 80, 1966.

²³¹ I. Mikulčić, Ubikacija na Bila Zora, 147-165, *Godišen Zbornik na Filozofski Fakultet* 2, 1976; www.tfahr.org

²³² I. Mikulčić, Stobi vo pred-rimsko vreme, 101-117, *Godišen Zbornik na Filozofski Fakultet* 13, 1985; M. Šurbanovska et al. 271-282, 2008.

²³³ A. Keramitčiev, Beleški od rekognosciranjata vo strumičkiot basen i po dolinata na Vardar 115, *Zbornik na Arheoloshki Muzej* III, 1961; I. Mikulčić, *Antički Gradovi vo Makedonija*, 152-154, Skopje 1999; for the process of Hellenization of material culture in general, D. Mitrevski, On the Hellenization process of the Iron Age culture in Macedonia, or on the early contacts between Macedonia and the Aegean regions 191-203, *Thracia* 11, 1995; V. B. Grozdanova, *Spomenici od Helenističkiot Period vo S.R. Makedonija*, Skopje 1987.

²³⁴ I. Mikulčić, 80-81, 1966, I. Mikulčić, 148-149, 1999, mentions the possibility of colonization in both regions during the 3rd century BC; for the region of Bregalnica see Z. „, Bregalničkiot Bazen vo Rimski i Ranosrednovjekoven Period 9-41, *Zbornik na Štipski Narodni Muzej* VI, 1990.

²³⁵ N.G. Hammond, T.G. Griffith, *A history of Macedonia* vol. II, Oxford 1979; E. Petrova, 1999.

²³⁶ I. Mikulčić, 20-21, 1982; V. Sokolovska, Pajonskoto pleme Agrijani i vrskite so Damastion 9-32, *Macedoniae Acta Archaeologica* 11, 1990.

processes. It's been assumed that after Alexander's conquests in the East and during the ensuing clashes between his successors, a considerable portion of the population of Upper Macedonia and Paionia moved to the East, whether to serve in the Macedonian armies or as colonizers²³⁷. This assumption is supported by the attempts of later Antigonid dynasts to establish new or re-colonize existing settlements in Upper Macedonia and Paionia, especially during the 3rd and the 2nd century BC. It is surely no accident that town names such as Antigonea or Perseida suddenly appear in the written sources relating to the 3rd and 2nd century BC²³⁸. Further evidence comes from their readiness to grant land to large contingents of foreign tribesmen in exchange for military and political alliance, during the decades between the Second and the Third Roman-Macedonian Wars²³⁹. The cause behind these desperate measures lies in the constant inroads of Dardanian and Thracian raiding parties into former Paionian territory, a condition that became particularly precarious with the arrival of the Romans on Macedon's western border. The last Antigonids were certainly aware of the upcoming perils and the final assimilation of the Paionian territories marked by the conquest of Byla Zora in 217 BC must have had the ultimate aim of imposing greater control over the northern borders of the Kingdom. By the middle of the 2nd century BC, the Paionians were obviously not in a position to fulfill the role of a buffer against the tribes of the Central Balkans²⁴⁰.

The differences in the archaeology of the Hellenistic Period in the northern and southern parts of the Republic of Macedonia are thus clearly emphasized by a political and territorial frontier. The regions along the Middle Vardar Valley, the Ovče Pole Plateau, the valleys of the rivers Bregalnica (ancient Astibo) and the Crna (ancient Erigon), all former Paionian territories, remained under the control of Macedon, while the regions along the Upper Vardar and the Kumanovo Pass were presumably left in Barbarian hands or were turned into a sort of no-man's land, if we're to trust some ancient sources²⁴¹. This line of division could be one of the earliest political frontiers in the region, defended by fortifications at strategic points and well-connected to bases in the interior to enable coordinated military actions²⁴². Its efficiency is best recognized by the fact that it survived the Kingdom of Macedon for over 150 years. The Romans will retain the same line of defense until the time of the Early Empire, when the frontier was pushed to the Danube Valley²⁴³.

Can we follow the impact of these ethnic and political divisions on the regional and local settlement pattern? Regarding infrastructure this early frontier was a far cry from the later Roman limes. In this respect it is impossible to claim if the survey area belonged to the sphere of control of Macedon's kings and the later Roman governors, solely on the basis of distribution of standing monuments. But considering the fact that the former Paionian capital was only about 16

²³⁷ E. Petrova 24, 1999.

²³⁸ I. Mikulčić, 80, 1966; I. Mikulčić, Problemot na Antigonea 111-135, *Godišen Zbornik na Filozofski Fakultet* 11, 1983; F. Papazoglu, 1988.

²³⁹ F. Papazoglu, *Srednjobalkanska plemena u pred-Rimsko doba*, 147-150, Sarajevo 1969.

²⁴⁰ I. Mikulčić, 149-165, 1976; E. Petrova 25, 1999.

²⁴¹ I. Mikulčić, map 1, 1976; F. Papazoglu, 24-133, 1969.

²⁴² There is plenty of evidence in the chronicle of Titus Livius, particularly in the sections covering the years of the Second Roman-Macedonian War, book 31-40; *Livy, The dawn of the Roman Empire*, translated by J.C. Yardley, Oxford 2000.

²⁴³ F. Papazoglu 133-34, 1969. Due to a lack of intensive and systematic survey data, the evidence comes from the distribution of coins, particularly the autonomous series of Macedon's towns and the coins minted by the first Roman governors. Very frequently they were collected from the same hill-forts, guarding the northern entrances of Macedon. N. Šeldarov, *Macedonia and Paeonia*, Skopje 2003. D. Donev, Some observations on the northern frontier of the ancient Macedonian Kingdom 29-63, *Macedonian Heritage* 26, 2005.

kilometers to the east and taking into account the natural geographic divisions in the region, it seems more likely that this area remained within the limits of ancient Macedon. Situated at the southern exit of the Taor Canyon, the physical barrier that separates the upper and the middle course of the Vardar and providing quick and easy access to the larger settlement centres in the Ovče Pole Plateau and the Mid-Vardar, the survey area was surely of a great strategic value to anyone ruling the Mid-Vardar Valley. However the intensive survey revealed only the remains of a tiny settlement, a larger farm or a small hamlet, unrelated to all earlier settlements and withdrawn from the main natural corridor connecting the Vardar Valley with the Veles Basin and the Ovče Pole Plateau. The main focus of occupation was obviously site 12, stretching over an area of less than 2000 sq meters, although as in many earlier periods, much smaller, isolated clusters were found dispersed across the entire topographic unit, hundreds of meters from the site core (map III_58). Despite the small size of the settlement, the distribution of the satellite clusters and the total dispersal area of the Hellenistic pottery suggest a fairly extensive impact zone, equal to that of the possible Late Neolithic settlement. This could indicate that the majority of the satellite clusters are remains of dispersed residential quarters.

Both the character of pottery production and the location of this site, suggests that there was little or no continuity with the Late Iron Age traditions. In all likelihood the area was abandoned for some period of time after the demise of the Late Iron Age settlement and prior to the establishment of the small Hellenistic settlement on site 12. An equally dramatic change is the reoccupation of the eastern bank or the Ramnište Ridge. During most of the local history of habitation, the main settlement was on the western bank of the central valley, exploiting more fertile stretches of land and exerting closer control over the exit from the Taor Gorge. In this context it would be very interesting to establish at least a rough dating for the post – Middle Neolithic assemblage on site 11.

The size and location of site 12 certainly don't reflect the military or political presence of ancient Macedon. It is possible that some of the Roman fortifications in the area have Hellenistic foundations; particularly the small fort over St. George's monastery, at the very exit of the canyon, but there lacks decisive evidence²⁴⁴. In fact the nearest site where occasional finds from the Hellenistic Period are reported is the abovementioned hill-fort on the southern shore of an artificial lake, 5 kilometers to the southeast of Sopot. Although there were no excavations or systematic surveys, rare fragments of Hellenistic pottery and a number of coins minted in the early decades of the 2nd century BC are sure signs that the site was occupied prior to the Roman conquest²⁴⁵. This too is a strategically important location, as it guards the entrance to the plain of Veles and blocks the route that leads parallel to the Vardar, by-passing the Taor Canyon and the survey area. This site was also in control of a plain that had far greater agricultural potential than the small valley of Sopot. In essence this is the northern half of the Veles Basin, measuring over 15 sq kilometers of arable land. It represents a very similar type of location to that of the fort "Gradište", Knežje, the supposed Paionian capital of Byla Zora. It too is situated in the central part of the Ovče Pole Plateau, rather than in the immediate vicinity of the mountain passes coming from the north. Both cases seem to illustrate the shift from the peripheral valleys to the central plains²⁴⁶. Unfortunately we lack even the most basic data for the Late Iron Age mound necropolis centres along the eastern edge of Ovče Pole or the one near the village Ivankovci, 8 kilometers northeast of Sopot.

²⁴⁴ I. Mikulčić 102, 1982.

²⁴⁵ N. Šeldarov, 260, 648, 670, 690, 2003.

²⁴⁶ D. Donev 51-52, 2005.

The overall character of site 12 and its very presence indicate something else. It is unusual for such small and undefended settlements to appear in a peripheral region, with a constantly impending threat of invasion. One would rather expect establishments of such rank in conditions of social and political security and uninterrupted access to larger markets. This could mean that the Dardanians and the other invading tribes didn't use the valley of Sopot and the corridor through the Vardar Valley, but the more open routes, running parallel to the Vardar and avoiding its narrow canyons²⁴⁷. When describing the surveyed basin and its place in the regional geographic context, it was mentioned that without an active transversal along the Vardar Valley, it loses its strategic value, becoming but a small and withdrawn outlet of the Veles Basin. Only similarly designed research in the small valleys to the east of Sopot can confirm or reject this thesis. Even if the survey area wasn't directly exposed to Barbarian raids, the small size and the location of the Hellenistic settlement suggest that living conditions in the region were nevertheless precarious. Otherwise it is difficult to explain the withdrawn location of site 12, as well as the abandonment of the more fertile western bank, in favor of the poorer soils of the Ramnište Ridge. The local settlement dynamic clearly indicates withdrawal and contraction during the Hellenistic Period, although it is very likely that this was more related to changes in the settlement pattern in the former Paionian territory, rather than to external instability.

It wasn't possible to point to a more narrow date for the Hellenistic assemblage from Sopot. This is locally produced pottery, bearing only faint resemblance to the more recognizable Hellenistic pottery classes. It is nevertheless evident that it shows even less similarity to the pottery of the Roman Period. It is quite possible that site 12 and the entire survey area were briefly abandoned in the first centuries of Roman occupation. But on the other hand, the total grid survey on this location did reveal finds datable to the Roman Period along the western periphery of the Hellenistic settlement.

One must bear in mind the historical circumstances in the regions of the Upper and the Middle Vardar Valley during the Late Hellenistic and Early Roman Period²⁴⁸. While the territory under control of the Antigonid dynasty fell under Roman control as early as 168 BC, immediately after the end of the Third Roman-Macedonian War, the regions to the north were only turned into a Roman province towards the middle of the 1st century AD. Although the Roman presence was certainly felt among the population of the Central Balkans by the middle 2nd century BC, the local material culture becomes fully Romanized only after the Roman conquest and the establishment of the first colonies²⁴⁹. Thus Scupi situated less than 60 km to the north of the survey area became a Roman colony almost two centuries after the Roman conquest of Macedonia²⁵⁰. Being located by the turbulent northern frontier of the newly created province and in the vicinity of the main regional corridor, it is quite probable that the studied micro-region became more intensely inhabited only towards the end of the Early Imperial phase. There is not a single example of the characteristic red slipped pottery or the imitations of Eastern Sigillata,

²⁴⁷ Also suggested by I. Mikulčić, 150, 1976.

²⁴⁸ F. Papazoglu, 138-143, 1969; also F. Papazoglu, 1988.

²⁴⁹ The history of the modern regions of Skopje and Kumanovo in the Early Roman Period, the southern end of Upper Moesia at the time, along with the epigraphic evidence are studied in B. Josifovska-Dragojević, *Inscriptions de la Mésie supérieure, Régions de Skopje et Kumanovo*, vol. VI, Belgrade 1982. For the region of the central Balkans in general, see A. Mócsy, *Pannonia and Upper Moesia*, London 1972.

²⁵⁰ B. Josifovska-Dragojević 3, 1982; archaeological evidence mostly comes from excavations in Scupi, L. Jovanova 197-198, 2008, I. Mikulčić, From the topography of Scupi, 29-35, *Archaeologica Iugoslavica* XIV, 1973.

featuring so prominently in the local production at Stobi. On the other hand the more familiar Late Roman wares, such as Gray Macedonian are well represented²⁵¹.

It was already explained that the period of the Late Republic and the Early Roman Empire are solely known from excavations on large urban centres, such as Stobi or Heraclea Lyncestis, in the south of the Pelagonian Plain. We know very little about what happened to the rest of the Hellenistic towns. Current excavations on the acropolis of Byla Zora confirmed the chronology proposed by earlier researchers. The site was abandoned by the 2nd century BC²⁵². However survey and accidentally excavated material show that the great majority of Hellenistic settlements along the Middle Vardar continued their existence after the Roman conquest, despite the strong expansion of Stobi²⁵³. Only on one site, 15 kilometers north of Stobi, is there clear evidence of decline and possible abandonment. It has to be stressed however that without exception, these are larger and fortified settlements. Only the enclosed area often measures several hectares. There is no or very little archaeological data pertaining to settlements of minor rank. This raises the familiar dilemma of whether the Roman Period brought nucleation and urban expansion or an overall population increase²⁵⁴.

Unfortunately the situation is not much different when the Early and Mid-Imperial periods are in question. Although over 70% of the sites listed in the archaeological atlas for the regions of Veles and Ovče Pole are broadly dated to the Roman or the Late Roman Period, a gigantic increase, especially in comparison to the Hellenistic Period, only a small number are dated more narrowly to the Early Roman Period. Moreover the majority of these “sites” are inscribed or decorated tombstones and statues, often found dislocated, with no certain information about their origins. But in cases when it is possible to relate them to certain sites, they are useful chronological indicators. It’s been long accepted by scholars of the period that the erection of inscribed or decorated stones for various purposes almost completely ceased by the beginning of the 4th century AD²⁵⁵. In fact in the Republic of Macedonia most of these monuments can be dated more narrowly between the late 1st and the late 3rd century AD²⁵⁶. Thus the period of the 1st century BC and the 1st century AD remains problematic, most of the information coming from excavations on larger civic centres and necropoleis²⁵⁷.

Another phenomenon marking the Early Imperial Period, especially in the eastern parts of the country, but also along parts of the Middle Vardar is the re-introduction of mound burials. Only a few of these mounds have been excavated and the earliest were dated to the late 1st –

²⁵¹ V.Stojanović-Anderson tab. 4.3-4.12, 1992; E. Maneva 21-32, 1979; M.Ončevska-Todorovska, tables 34-35, 2004.

²⁵² I. Mikulčić, 163-164, 1976; www.tfahr.org.

²⁵³ I. Mikulčić, 1999; although the author’s opinion was rather the contrary in some earlier publications; I. Mikulčić, 133, 1983.

²⁵⁴ Cf. S.E. Alcock, 1993; J. Bintliff, 315-318, 2012.

²⁵⁵ This epigraphic decline is characteristic for most regions of the Balkan Peninsula, except for a few larger urban centres on the coast, A. G. Poulter, *The transition to Late Antiquity, 1-50*, especially 11-12, ed. A.G. Poulter, *The Transition to Late Antiquity on the Danube and Beyond*, Oxford 2007; J. Bintliff, 360, 2012.

²⁵⁶ B. Josifovska-Dragojević, 1982; F. Papazoglu, *Istoriski priliki: Lihnid vo vremeto na ranoto Carstvo* 101-113, *Ohrid i ohridsko niz istorijata*, Skopje 1985.

²⁵⁷ A. Wessolowski, *Burial customs in the west cemetery* 97-141, eds. J. Wiseman, Dj. Mano-Zissi, et al. *Studies in the Antiquities of Stobi I*, T. Veles 1973; I. Mikulčić, 48-52, 2003; E. Nikolova 247-271, 2008; I. Mikulčić, 29-35, 1973, I. Mikulčić, *Ranorimski skeletni grobovi iz Skupa* 89-102, *Starinar* XXIV-XXV, 1975; E. Maneva, 1979; I. Mikulčić, 55-72, 1999.

early 2nd century AD²⁵⁸. Some of the few scholars that have dealt with the problem of these mounds attribute them to certain Thracian tribes, settling in the Bregalnica Valley by the 1st century BC. It is symptomatic that they often appear in the areas of earlier, Late Iron Age mound necropoleis, sometimes incorporating the older mounds. This conservative tradition has actually survived into the 4th century AD²⁵⁹. As in the case of the Iron Age mound necropoleis, the corresponding settlements have not been located. It has to be noted that these were most probably individual or family burial chambers, an alternative to the Hellenistic-Roman traditions of erecting family mausolea in the countryside (map III_59)²⁶⁰.

The distribution pattern of these two categories of archaeological sites is obviously not representative of the actual settlement pattern during the Early and Mid-Imperial periods. A large portion of the sites broadly determined as Roman in the archaeological atlas were probably established by the late 1st, early 2nd century AD. The increased number of sites datable to the Middle and especially the Late Roman Period, to a large degree reflects the monumental character of archaeological remains in the period between the 2nd and 6th century AD. It doesn't mean that this evidence needs to be downgraded. Evidently there was an expansion of building activity, both in the towns and in the countryside, but the basis for this development could go back at least to the 1st century AD.

Looking at the distribution of sites dated more narrowly to the Early and Mid Imperial periods, it has to be remembered that these are nearly always remains of necropoleis or more rarely sanctuaries²⁶¹. Moreover they are often securely characterized by researchers as small family mausolea, which explains their frequent appearing in fairly large concentrations in certain areas. Nevertheless one cannot deny that by the 2nd century AD, many of the smaller peripheral basins in the regions of the Middle Vardar and the Bregalnica were reoccupied. In a number of cases, the sites of the local settlements were roughly determined. According to the cursory descriptions, the majority is situated on gentle, lower terraces, close to the arable land, but there are also examples of occupied hill-tops, not necessarily fortified. In some cases they occupy areas of at least 2 or 3 hectares, which is a fairly large rural settlement by local standards. Perhaps one of the most noticeable features of the Early to Mid-Imperial landscapes is the unusually high density of sites on relatively small areas. In certain parishes along the Middle Vardar Valley, extensive or architectural surveys have recorded up to 4 sites per 1 sq kilometer²⁶².

Often there are combinations of one or two possible settlement sites and a number of smaller, burial or other special-purpose sites, obviously resembling the distribution of Roman sites in the survey area. Admittedly the number of finds in the survey area datable prior to the 4th century is too small, but they are clearly distributed on at least two different sites. The farm on site 12 was reoccupied or continued to exist for some time in the Roman Period and at the same time, site 5a was reoccupied (map III_60). To these finds, one should add the two funerary stelai with inscriptions, brought (or found) in the monastic complex. It is also possible that the small

²⁵⁸ M. Garašanin, D. Garašanin, *Arheološke beleške sa rekognosciranja u Istočnoj Makedonji 69-95, Zbornik na Štupski Narodni Muzej* II 1961; M. Garašanin, D. Garašanin, *Iskopavanja na mogilata Krst, kaj selo Tarinci 65-69, Zbornik na Štupski Narodni Muzej* II 1961; Z. Beldedovski, 17-27, 1990.

²⁵⁹ V. Sanev, 7-20, 1978.

²⁶⁰ Information is taken from the archaeological atlas and surveys of Early Roman architectural sculpture and inscriptions, V. Lilčić, *Makedonski kamen za bogovite, Hristijanite i za život po životot*, vol. I, Skopje 2001; B. Josifovska-Dragojević, map1, 1982.

²⁶¹ V. Lilčić, 461-463, 2001.

²⁶² V. Lilčić, 245-246, 351-361, 2001; B. Josifovska-Dragojević, *Izveštaj za arheološkoto rekognosciranje po dolinata na Sreden Vardar 106-127, Zbornik na Arheološki Muzej* IV-V, 1966.

fort above the monastery was built at the same time. We should recall that the border between the provinces of Macedonia and Moesia followed the line of the northern frontier of the Kingdom of Macedon, probably passing very close to the survey area²⁶³.

As it proved impossible to define a separate Early to Mid-Imperial pottery assemblage, there is no basis to speculate about the size or the rank of these sites. It is in any case evident that this was a period of stabilization and expansion of local settlement. In a sense the situation was slowly returning to the pre-Late Iron Age level. The main settlement was re-instated on site 5a for the third time in the history of habitation in the survey area. The reoccupation of this exposed location and the possible building of the small fort at the very exit of the Taor Gorge indicate a renewed security within the broader region, but also perhaps a reactivation of the Vardar Valley as the main interregional corridor. This is after all the shortest line connecting Thessalonica, Stobi and Scupi and the stable conditions brought by the Pax Romana enabled its normal functioning²⁶⁴. This reorganization of the local settlement during the period of the Principate laid down the foundations for further settlement expansion during the period of the Late Roman Empire.

There are almost no mentions of the regions along the Vardar Valley and the province of Macedonia in general, during the Early and the Mid-Imperial periods. The situation changes drastically after the end of the 3rd century AD. Apart from the historical narratives of various chroniclers, a lot of valuable information comes from official documents, such as itineraries or the lists of imperial dignitaries and ecclesiastical sources²⁶⁵. On the one hand, they inform us about developed urban life and road networks. Most of the earlier larger towns grew into Episcopal sees and we hear of a number of new urban centres, especially in the eastern regions of the country, along the Middle and the Upper Bregalnica. On the other hand, the historical narratives covering the period between the 4th and the late 6th century abound with violent events. Most prominent are the records of Barbarian invasions, especially the Gothic invasion of 378 AD, the Hunnic invasions of the 440's, the raids of the Ostrogoths in 479 AD and the repetitive incursions of the Slavs and Avars during the 6th century²⁶⁶. In some of these incidents the Barbarian invaders used the Vardar Valley, either on their way to the Plain of Thessalonica or on their way back to the Danube. The sack of Stobi and Scupi is mentioned by a number of reliable sources and it is confirmed by archaeological evidence on both sites²⁶⁷. But despite this chronic instability, buildings were repaired or built anew, not only in Scupi and Stobi, but also in other urban centers. There is however evidence of considerable contraction of the urban cores. This is especially evident in Stobi and in Heraclea Lyncestis, in the south Pelagonian Plain²⁶⁸. The Late Roman walls of Stobi enclosed an area of about 15 hectares, nearly three times smaller than the

²⁶³ I. Mikulčić, 210-212, 1999; I. Mikulčić, 20-21, Munich 2002.

²⁶⁴ Which doesn't mean that the parallel routes were closed; it is quite possible that a cart-road functioned through the canyons of the Vardar Valley, while the caravan road followed the gentler but slower route through the low mountain passes, 4 km east of the canyon. A similar situation has been documented on the hostile terrain of Demir Kapija (ancient Stenae), 70 km south of the Taor Canyon. I. Mikulčić, 65-78, 1988-1989.

²⁶⁵ I. Mikulčić, 9-19, 2002; F. Papazoglu, 8-21, 1988.

²⁶⁶ A more recent overview of the period, with a particular emphasis on the eastern part of the Balkan Peninsula is given by J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *The Lower Danube under pressure: from Valens to Heraclius*, 101-134, ed. A.G. Poulter, 2007; for the central and western Balkans see J-P. Sodini, *The transformation of cities in Late Antiquity within the provinces of Macedonia and Epirus*, 311-336, the same volume.

²⁶⁷ I. Mikulčić, *Some new factors in the history of Stobi* 205-229, Eds. J. Wiseman, B. Aleksova, *Studies in the Antiquities of Stobi*, vol. III, T. Veles, 1981; D. Koračević, 2002; J-P. Sodini, 313, ed. A. Poulter, 2007.

²⁶⁸ I. Mikulčić, 254-255, 1999; I. Mikulčić, 108-112, 2003; the phenomenon is much more widespread, J-P. Sodini, 320, 2007; cf. the example of Thespiiai in Boeotia J. Bintliff, A. Snodgrass, 57-61, 1988.

fortified area of the Early Imperial town. In Heraclea Lyncestis the fortified area was limited to the former town-square and its Christian basilicas. The case of this town vividly illustrates the fate of most urban centres that have survived the end of the 4th century; they literally became identical with the Episcopal see. In many Late Roman towns most of the urban core consisted of churches and palaces of the church dignitaries²⁶⁹.

Nevertheless excavations in Stobi, Scupi and Heraclea Lyncestis have revealed that the civilian populations continued to dwell in these settlements, at least until the late 6th century AD. Living conditions have evidently declined, especially towards the end of the 5th and throughout the 6th century. Most of the dwellings from this period were made of mud-brick and spolia from deserted public edifices. In Heraclea Lyncestis an entire quarter of humble houses was revealed atop the theater. Similar dwellings appear in some of Stobi's former palaces and the Early Christian basilica in Scupi²⁷⁰. Thus although life continued on the majority of the larger Hellenistic-Roman centres, the contraction and the drastic decline of living standards in the ancient urban centres are more than evident, especially during the late 5th and throughout the 6th century.

But at the same time there is more archaeological information from the countryside, especially when compared to the Early and Middle Imperial phases. The monumental family mausolea and mounds marking the countryside landscape during the period of the Principate completely disappear by the end of the 4th century. They are replaced by two other phenomena that will become typical for the Late Roman Period. These are the fortified hill-tops²⁷¹ and the Early Christian chapels²⁷². The majority of the Roman sites listed in the archaeological atlas are dated more narrowly to the Late Roman Period or between the early 4th and late 6th century AD. This is largely due to the fact that these types of monumental remains have drawn the attention of some of the earliest field researchers in the country. There is nonetheless a considerable number of Late Roman sites that occupy flat and open locations, not unlike those of early prehistoric sites. Indeed we saw that a large number of open prehistoric settlements were reoccupied during the Roman or Late Roman periods. In the archaeological atlas, these sites are variably called rural settlements or villas. Rarely a rough estimate of their size is given, ranging from several thousand sq meters to 3-4 hectares. The dating remains slightly problematic, because for only a smaller number of sites is there a more substantial body of evidence. In some cases the proposed dating is based on stray coin finds or presumably, on the building materials. It

²⁶⁹ This is another feature of Late Antique towns recurring throughout the Balkan provinces and beyond, A.G. Poulter, *The transition to Late antiquity on the Lower Danube: the city, a fort, and the countryside*, 51-97, ed. A.G. Poulter, 2007; B. Bavant, *Caričin Grad and the changes in the nature of urbanism in the central Balkans in the sixth century*, 337-374, the same volume; B. Aleksova, C. Mango, *Bargala: a preliminary report*, 269-281, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 25, 1971; for Greece, J. Bintliff, 360-363, 2012; for a broader perspective see, L. Lavan ed. *Recent research in Late Antique urbanism*, *Journal of Roman Archaeology* supplement 42, 2001.

²⁷⁰ I. Mikulčić, 209, 1981; T. Janakievski, *Docnoantička mikrostanbena celina nad teatarot vo Heraclea Lyncestis*, Bitola 2001; D. Koračević 157-173, 2002.

²⁷¹ There is an extensive bibliographic list on the topic of Late Antique fortifications in the Balkan Peninsula. More recent treatise of the subject can be found in J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, 107-110, ed. A.G. Poulter, 2007; I. Mikulčić, 2002; V. Lilčić, *Late Antique communications and fortification in the Mid-Vardar Region* 13-53, *Macedonian Heritage* 7, 1998; V. Dinčev, *Ranovizantiite kreposti v B'lgaria i s'sednite zemi*, *Razkopki i proučvania* XXXV, 2006; M. Milinković, *Stadt oder "Stadt": Frühbyzantinische Siedlungsstrukturen im nördlichen Illyricum*, 159-192, ed. J. Henning, *Post-Roman towns, trade and settlement in Europe and Byzantium* vol. 2, Berlin 2007.

²⁷² I. Mikulčić, *Frühchristlicher Kirchenbau in der S.R. Makedonien 221-251*, *Corso di cultura sull'arte ravennate et bizantina* XXXIII, Ravenna 1986; B. Aleksova, *Loca sanctorum macedoniae*, Skopje 1995; I. Mikulčić, 2002; V. Lilčić, vol. II, 2002.

is noteworthy that in many entries, it is explicitly stated that the surface clusters consisted of tile, building material and pithoi fragments, sometimes stressing the scarcity of pottery fragments. At least two or three sites from the area of Sopot closely match this description, sites 2, 13a-b and 14. Burial in isolated monumental tombs continues well into the 4th century, but there are also examples of small groups of later, cist burials²⁷³. As usual the corresponding settlement sites have not been located, but the appearance of small, isolated groups of tombs in the countryside could indicate that isolated agricultural estates continued to dot the landscape, at least throughout the 4th century AD.

All this seemingly leads to the conclusion that the Late Roman was a period of considerable settlement expansion in the countryside, not only along the Vardar Valley, but in most other regions of the country and in the wider region²⁷⁴. Even if we allow that many of the open sites dated to the Late Roman Period have an earlier, pre-4th century phase, it doesn't cancel the fact that the great majority of over 500 known fortifications and hundreds of Christian basilicas were either founded or completely built anew during this period. However as discussed in the first half of this chapter, a recent study has rightly doubted the extent of the Late Roman revival, especially in the countryside²⁷⁵. Unlike the plain pottery of the Early and Middle Imperial Periods, Late Roman storage and transport vessels (and one may add tile) are far more recognizable in the surface record. It is thus quite possible that a considerable portion of the finds broadly dated Roman in survey and excavation publications actually date to the Early and Middle Imperial Periods. This implies that the Late Roman recovery could have begun by the Middle Imperial phase, if not earlier²⁷⁶.

The developments during the Late Roman Period in the survey area are not an isolated phenomenon. There is an evident expansion of settlement, especially in the countryside, in most parts of the country. Examples of Late Roman architectural sculpture begin to appear even in the most isolated, mountainous parts of the river basins. Their appearance in these hostile environments, poor with resources has often puzzled researchers²⁷⁷. Some scholars have speculated about an intensified exploitation of metal ores, related to the increased presence of the Roman army on the Danube during the 4th century. Extensive surveys of the mountainous regions in the Upper Bregalnica, on the high plateaux south of the river Crna and elsewhere have indeed revealed substantial evidence of mining activities, mostly datable between the 4th and 6th century AD²⁷⁸. But there is an evident expansion of building activity even in areas poor with mineral resources. At the same time one cannot fully accept the claim that there was a general shift in settlement focus, from the lower sections of the major valleys to their upper peripheral stretches, simply incited by the increased insecurity in a period marked by massive and often violent invasions²⁷⁹. The decline and contraction of the former urban centres is undeniable. There

²⁷³ G. Dimitrioska, Grupa Docnorimski grobovi od Kamnik, 131-138, *Macedoniae Acta Archaeologica* 5, 1979; Đ. Petački, A complex of Late Antique vaulted tomb chambers from Veles, 79-88, *Macedonian Heritage* 5, 1997; D. Kalamagdeska-Mihailova, Late Antique AREA MACERIA CINCTA from Novo Selo-Zelenikovo 23-28, *Macedonian Heritage* 20, 2002.

²⁷⁴ Cf. J. Bintliff, 2012, chapter 15.

²⁷⁵ D.K. Pettegrew, 743-784, 2007.

²⁷⁶ D.K. Pettegrew, 778, 2007.

²⁷⁷ I. Mikulčić, 193, 1976.

²⁷⁸ I. Mikulčić, 285-290, 1999; A. Keramitčiev, Za staroto rudarstvo vo Mariovo I, 89-104, *Macedoniae Acta Archaeologica* 2, 1976, A. Keramitčiev. Za staroto rudarstvo vo Mariovo II, 67-81, *Macedoniae Acta Archaeologica* 4, 1978.

²⁷⁹ I. Mikulčić, 267, 1999; I. Mikulčić. 57, 1982; V. Lilčić, 533, 2002.

is also clear evidence for desertion of some of the Early to Mid-Imperial rural estates. However on many sites there is evidence of continued occupation during the Late Roman Period and there are even a greater number of sites that were probably established or at least prospered after 300 AD.

What remains uncertain is the true extent of this Late Roman expansion in the rural areas, as well as its underlying cause²⁸⁰. It is clear that there was a certain increase in the number of sites compared to the periods of the Early and Middle Empire, even if allowing that the Late Roman remains are more recognizable in the surface record. It is another question if all of these sites were actually permanently inhabited. Doubtless many of the Late Roman fortifications have plenty of surface material, indicating permanent occupation. But an equally large or possibly even a larger number of forts lack substantial surface remains, apart from building rubble and tile²⁸¹. For example on only two of the eight hill-forts documented along the southern end of the Taor Canyon were there fragments of pottery for domestic purposes. Erosion or ground visibility conditions cannot always account for this fact. A similar situation was encountered on a number of “flat” Late Roman sites in the survey area and we saw in the archaeological atlas that many of the Late Roman sites are described as “clusters of stone rubble, tile and pithoi fragments and very little pottery”. There is little ground to speculate about the character of these sites, but they are evidently different from the typical remains of domestic occupation²⁸². Apart from small familial necropoleis, sanctuaries and various types of agricultural estates, one has to take into account the possible state-sponsored establishments for the purposes of road security and maintenance, the postal and customs service or the extraction and processing of metal ore²⁸³.

The towns and the countryside seem to experience divergent developments during this period. It is difficult to ascribe this tendency solely to the constant threat of Barbarian invasions. They are better understood in the context of internal socio-economic and demographic developments, such as the demise of the old city-based landowning elite, the growing importance of the small estate run by soldier-farmers tied to their land²⁸⁴ and the increased presence of the state apparatus. Finally, one cannot exclude the possibility of an actual population growth in these regions, at least during the 4th and early 5th century AD²⁸⁵.

As in most other micro-regions, the Late Roman Period left considerable traces in the surface archaeology of the survey area (map III_61). Apart from the three fortifications marking the corners of the lower half of the valley of Sopot and delimiting the settlement’s territory, the hamlet on site 5a reached its maximum, possibly spreading over to the neighbouring field on the west. This was obviously the main settlement centre in the immediate surroundings. Occupation was also renewed on site 8, at Prisoj’s eastern foot, though on a much smaller scale. On the eastern bank of the valley, site 12 is completely abandoned by this time, but the two sites 13a-

²⁸⁰ J. Banaji, *Agrarian Change in Late Antiquity: Gold, Labour and Aristocratic Dominance*, Oxford 2001; D.K. Pettegrew, 775-777, 2007, J. Bintliff, 357-358, 2012.

²⁸¹ J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, 106, ed. A.G. Poulter, 2007, points out that many of these fortifications could have been constructed by the local rural populations to serve as refugia, see note 190.

²⁸² Similarly composed assemblages on Late Roman rural sites have been discovered by the regional survey projects in Boeotia and Laconia, J.L. Bintliff, P. Howard, A.M. Snodgrass, fig. 5.1, 2007; W. Cavanagh, C. Mee and P. James, et al. 2005; C. Mee, H. Forbes, 1997.

²⁸³ I. Mikulčić, 58-64, 1982.

²⁸⁴ See however M.H. Jameson et al, 400-415, 1994; J. Bintliff, P. Howard, A. Snodgrass, et al. 158-159, 2007; for evidence of large estates during the Late Roman Period in central and southern Greece.

²⁸⁵ A far less optimistic picture is painted in the studies in A.G. Poulter ed. 2007, possibly because the focus is on the eastern Balkan provinces, far more exposed to events on the Danube frontier.

13b on the Jakupica Ridge and their satellites 14 and 15 at the western foot of Radičica were most probably newly established or at least continued their existence into the Late Roman Period. There was at last a continued activity in sector I, on the Vardar Valley floor. Thus for the first time in the history of local settlement there are traces of activity in nearly all micro-topographic units that constitute the studied landscape. Every potential arable piece of land was occupied by an establishment of an according rank. In fact small amounts of material datable to the Late Roman Period were documented on over two thirds of the surveyed territory.

But regardless of these positive signs there are a good number of reasons to be skeptical about the actual growth in terms of population and settlement rank. Most important of all, and this is something for which we completely lack comparative data, is the small amount of Late Roman remains on the surface, especially when compared to the several times larger concentrations of prehistoric finds. Although compounded by the presence of brick and tile, the Late Roman assemblages never fully obscured the superimposed remains of earlier epochs and in some cases, the opposite happened. In fact two of the three forts featured an artifact density only slightly higher than in the off-site zone. The isolated clusters of finds in sector I consist almost exclusively of tile and very similar assemblages were discovered in sector X, on the Jakupica Ridge. Only on two sites did the collected finds form a full domestic assemblage, including architectural ceramics, table ware, cooking and storage vessels. These are sites 5a-5b and 8, whose combined territory is slightly over 1 hectare. This is an evident increase from the Hellenistic and probably the Early Roman Period, but from a long-term perspective, it is essentially a return to the settlement rank of earlier, prehistoric periods.

We need to consider one final issue related to the expansion of settlement during the Late Roman Period, both in the survey area and in the broader region. Apart from the increased number of sites of various types and sizes, the careful recording of individual surface artifacts revealed an ultra-thin carpet of (predominantly?) Late Roman material spreading across the entire landscape, covering even abandoned areas. Unlike the ubiquitous off-site carpets discovered in certain parts of Greece and the Near East, this manifestation is invisible prior to the highly intensive survey, collection and study of the surface artifacts. One is dealing with densities on the order of 0.1-0.5 shards per 100 sq meters or between 1 and 5 fragments, scattered across an area of 1000 sq meters. In the first survey area it was possible to observe a general pattern in the composition of this material. Zones closer to the settlement sites featured not only slightly higher densities, but also a roughly equal percentage of tile and pottery, while in the more peripheral parts of the landscape (excluding sectors where the presence of sites of intermediary density is suspected), the thin scatter of Roman to Late Roman finds consists almost exclusively of worn fragments of brick and tile. Evidently this is not a homogenous off-site carpet: the thin scatters of tile in the peripheral survey sectors could have hardly originated from the same source as the material in the western survey half. The latter is clearly identical to the material collected from the settlements on sites 5a-5b and 8. Considering its extreme sparseness and wide dispersal area chiefly overlapping with the most fertile stretches of land in the basin, this ultra-thin layer of Roman to Late Roman finds was interpreted as the inorganic remains of ancient manure. On the other hand, the equally thin scatters of brick and tile and the occasional pithos fragments in the more distant survey sectors were seen as the remains of minor farms, field-sheds or non-residential activities.

At this point however we run into a problem. If the increase in population during the Roman-Late Roman Period was slight in comparison to other periods of settlement in the survey area, it becomes difficult to explain the need to intensify agricultural exploitation. And yet this is

what the existence of both the extensive shards scatter and the peripheral clusters of architectural ceramics suggest. One possible explanation is that the exact size of the Roman to Late Roman settlement is actually underestimated and that we should interpret all major clusters of Roman to Late Roman material as contemporary and fully residential sites, regardless of the composition of the ceramic assemblages. This will increase the total occupied area to slightly over 2 hectares, more than twice the occupied area during the Late Byzantine-Early Ottoman and certain prehistoric periods. But accepting this as a likely scenario doesn't solve the problem of the relatively low density of Roman to Late Roman material on site locations. This cannot be explained by simply pointing to the peculiarities of the local taphonomic or ground visibility conditions, because we had examples of multi-period sites where artifact densities for earlier periods were much higher than for the Roman to Late Roman assemblages, although they were collected from the same location. One could think of the possibility that this episode of growth was short-lived, but this is again difficult to reconcile with the fairly extensive off-site carpet and the considerable variety of fabric groups. We are therefore inclined to believe that the evidence of intensified agricultural exploitation doesn't reflect solely demographic tendencies, but also a specific socio-economic environment and agrarian relations. The phenomenon of the busy Late Roman countryside is far from being unique to our study region. Allowing for certain degree of regional variability, it can be observed throughout the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean²⁸⁶. Apart from the problematic increase in population, scholars in the field have pointed to the impact of the new capital of Constantinople and the booming of the other urban centres in the Eastern Empire, the proximity of the army and the stationing of garrisons in previously demilitarized provinces, the fiscal policy and taxation in the Late Empire and so forth²⁸⁷. The incentive for increased investments in agriculture doesn't necessarily need to be related to demographic pressures.

Because of the low chronological resolution, it is impossible to pin-point the exact date when these Late Roman settlements were deserted. Most of the finds could only be roughly dated between the 4th and late 6th century AD. It is generally accepted that the great majority of the Late Roman settlements were abandoned by the last quarter of the 6th century. This claim is supported both by evidence from historical sources and from archaeological research on the old urban settlements, but also on a number of larger, well-defended fortifications²⁸⁸. It is possible that some of the low-land sites were abandoned earlier, but there lacks decisive evidence²⁸⁹.

By the end of the 6th century AD nearly all known settlements were either completely abandoned or continued to exist on a much humbler scale, leaving traces that we still can't recognize in the archaeological record. On the entire territory of the Republic of Macedonia, there are only a few incidentally discovered sites datable prior to the late 9th century²⁹⁰. In many cases these are isolated finds, discovered on settlements from the Late Roman Period, such as Scupi and Stobi, but there were also newly established settlements, unrelated to those of the

²⁸⁶ J. L. Bintliff, The contribution of regional survey to the Late Antiquity debate: Greece in its Mediterranean context, 649-678, ed. A.G. Poulter, 2007; D.K. Pettegrew, 760-765, 2007.

²⁸⁷ C.R. Whittaker, Late Roman trade and traders, 163-180, eds. P. Garnsey, K. Hopkins, C.R. Whittaker, *Trade in the Ancient Economy*, Berkeley-Los Angeles 1983; J. Banaji, 60-65, 2001; C. Kosso, *The archaeology of public policy in Late Roman Greece*, Oxford 2003; J. Bintliff, 357-358, 2012.

²⁸⁸ C. Snively, Golemo Gradište at Konjuh: Reports on the excavations in 2000 293-302, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 56, 2002.

²⁸⁹ For example, excavations in Scupi revealed a continuous presence on small parts of the town well into the Middle Age, D. Koračević 157-173, 2002.

²⁹⁰ D. Koračević, 157-173, 2002; B. Risteski 49-53, 2004; Z. Beldedovski 45-49, 1990.

previous period. In all of these examples there is very little information about their actual size and extent. The scarcity of archaeological remains from this period is matched by the silence of contemporary historical sources. The chroniclers of the time mention the names of at least a dozen different Slavic tribes, but they are all situated on the territory of modern Greece. The northernmost tribe, according to these sources, occupied the lower Strymon Valley²⁹¹. However it must be noted that in the past couple of decades the increased attention given to plain and coarse fabrics has resulted in the discovery of post-Roman phases on a number of Late Roman sites in the Aegean. This material is often accompanied by fine ware traditionally dated not later than the early 7th century, which makes it very likely that the post-Antique phase was overlooked on at least some of the excavated Late Roman centres²⁹².

The earliest mentions of the Vardar Valley and the surrounding regions in the historical records date to the second half of the 9th century, this also being the period to which the first more substantial archaeological remains are dated²⁹³. They consist almost exclusively of churches and chapels, often built over Early Christian basilicas and accompanied by cemeteries. Scattered evidence for the period between the 9th and 12th century also comes from nearly all known Medieval fortresses, although the earliest architectural remains begin to appear only towards the end of the 10th and the beginning of the 11th century²⁹⁴. On most of these sites very little is preserved of this period on the surface, due to the fact that many were used well into the Ottoman Period. On the other hand the strong Late Roman walls were often only repaired and slightly modified, leaving very little evidence of the post-Antique phase in the architecture²⁹⁵. This circumstance further diminishes the visibility of the Early and Mid-Byzantine periods in the surface archaeological record.

The (re)building of the first churches and fortresses roughly coincides with the emergence of the first Medieval states in the region and the Byzantine re-conquest of the Balkans. The names of many of these towns are recorded in the written sources and the majority will become the core of the later Ottoman and Early Modern towns. Being often occupied for nearly a millennium, very little is known about the inner organization and the social rank of the towns of the Mid-Byzantine Period. Thanks to historical sources, it is possible to conclude that these early towns were primarily administrative and military centres. Civic quarters or “lower towns” developed separately²⁹⁶. It has to be stressed however that most of the evidence comes

²⁹¹ V. Popović, *Aux origins de la slavisation des Balkans 230-257*, *Comptes rendu des séances de Académie des inscriptions et belles lettres* 1, 1980. I. Mikulčić 27-28, 1996; though this approach of supporting historical evidence of invasions with coin hoards has been criticized, M.D. Metcalf, *Avar and Slav invasions into the Balkan Peninsula (c. 575-625): The nature of numismatic evidence*, 140-148, *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 4, 1991; for the historical sources, F. Curta, *The Making of the Slavs: History and Archaeology of the Lower Danube Region (c. 500-700)*, Cambridge 2001.

²⁹² A.K. Vionis, J. Poblome, M. Waelkens, 147-165, 2009; A.K. Vionis, *The Medieval and post-Medieval pottery and Tanagra village history*, 570-578, J.L. Bintliff, et al. *The Tanagra Project: Investigations at an ancient Boeotian city and in its countryside*, B.C.H. 128-129, 2004-2005.

²⁹³ S. Antoljak, *Srednovekovna Makedonija*, vol. I, Skopje 1985; B. Aleksova 20-22, 1989; B. Babić, *Materijalna kultura na makedonskite Sloveni, vo svetlina na arheoloshkite iskopuvanja vo Prilep*, Prilep 1986.

²⁹⁴ E. Maneva 186-208, 1992; I. Mikulčić *Srednovekovni Gradovi vo Makedonija*, 135-356 (catalogue of forts), Skopje 1996. In recent years, systematic excavations were initiated on the citadels of most major towns in the country. According to the preliminary reports, the findings of earlier researchers have been mostly confirmed, www.mav.mk.

²⁹⁵ I. Mikulčić, 68-69, 1996.

²⁹⁶ A few researchers have dealt with the problem of the genesis of Medieval urban centres in the southern Balkans; particularly for the region of Macedonia, S. Antoljak 524, 1985; I. Mikulčić, 39-41, 1996; A. Dunn, *The*

from the 14th century, from towns that have preserved the main lines of their Medieval topography and from historical sources.

Not surprisingly even less archaeological evidence has come from the countryside. This is not only the case with the Mid-Byzantine Period, but also with the subsequent Late Byzantine and Early Ottoman periods. The data presented in the archaeological atlas are to a great extent useless, because with rare exceptions, the sites are very broadly determined as Medieval. Moreover the great majority of them consist of churches and adjoining cemeteries. For example, of about 20 identified sites for the region of Veles, only two are identified as settlements. However one wonders if these sites are truly Medieval or perhaps Early or even Late Ottoman. The general impression is that the term “Medieval” has been applied to remains datable anywhere between the end of Antiquity and the Late Ottoman Period. It is thus rather difficult to put the findings from the Sopot survey into a broader, regional context (map III_62).

The nearest sites datable to the Middle and the Late Byzantine Period are two fortifications, situated 7 and 11 kilometers to the north and south of Sopot. Both forts were built by the late 12th century and controlled sections of the Vardar Valley road²⁹⁷. Their appearance in this rugged, inhospitable terrain above the narrow canyons of the Vardar, perhaps reflects the continued importance of the natural corridor along the river. It should be stressed that they both have Late Roman phases. The two forts occupy very steep hillocks, offering little room for a “lower town”. These were castles, enclosing areas not larger than a couple of hectares and were most probably reserved for a local landlord and a small military force²⁹⁸. There is very little arable land in the surroundings; the nearest fertile stretches lie at distances of over 1 kilometer from the forts. This is where presently and in the recent past, the main settlements were situated. In the case of the fort to the north of Sopot, this is a small village, situated 1200 meters to the west, on the right bank of the Pčinja. The fort to the south of Sopot, Medieval Veles, gained much greater importance during the Ottoman Period, developing into a larger town. The castle and the possible “lower town” in the narrow canyon at the foot of the fort were gradually abandoned and the new civic centre moved an entire kilometer and a half to the north, giving the name to the entire basin (maps III_63 and 64). In both cases a ring of chapels delimits the narrower territory of the castles.

Compared to the Late Roman Period, the fortifications network of the Middle Age is obviously much sparser, but one has to take into account the fact that these were not the sole centres of the landowning class. There is ample historical evidence that by the late 12th century, the greater portion of the land belonged to the numerous monastic centres²⁹⁹. In rare cases these too can develop into fortified complexes³⁰⁰, but most commonly they leave very humble traces in the surface archaeological record. Constant renovations in later centuries further contribute to the low state of preservation of surface remains from earlier phases. Of the four monastic complexes

transition from polis to kastron in the Balkans (III-VII c): General and regional perspectives, 60-80, *Byzantine and modern Greek studies* 18, 1994; for Greece, see J. Bintliff, 394-395, 409-411, 2012.

²⁹⁷ I. Mikulčić, 133-135, 1982; I. Mikulčić, 340-344, 1996; www.mav.mk.

²⁹⁸ I. Mikulčić, 133-134, 1982, the author interprets the fort to the north of Sopot as a military castle, while the one to the south, Veles as a town. Although there were probably differences in status between the two, they occupy absolutely identical positions, at an equal distance from agricultural land.

²⁹⁹ V. Mošin et al. *Spomenici za srednovekovnata i ponovata istorija na Makedonija*, Skopje 1975. The castle of “Markovi Kuli” to the north of Sopot and the monastic church of St. Nicholas are particularly illustrating examples. According to a mid-14th century edict, the entire land surrounding the castle actually belonged to the nearby monastery of St. Nicholas, I. Mikulčić, 134, 1982.

³⁰⁰ V. Lilčić, The canyon of Matka, 47-59, *Macedonian Heritage* 3, 1997.

situated along the southern portion of the Taor Canyon, only the one near the castle “Markovi Kuli” was certainly established by the 14th century. The rest are relatively recent foundations, like St. George’s monastery near Sopot, though it is possible that some of them have earlier foundations.

The network of Medieval castles, towns and monasteries must have been complemented by a much larger number of small, rural settlements, which for the greater part have been ignored as a research subject, both by archaeologists and Medievalists. From an archaeological point of view, the greater part of the problem lies in the humble character of the material remains; not only the near absence of larger architectural monuments, but also the relatively low level of distinctiveness of locally produced, plain pottery. Unlike the pottery assemblages from the urban settlements, regularly comprising a certain amount of very distinctive glazed pottery, it seems that this category is very scarce in the countryside, at least until the end of the Byzantine or even the Early Ottoman Period³⁰¹. A caution is necessary however, because the published studies deal with material that comes almost exclusively from high-ranking settlements or monasteries. Another possible circumstance contributing to the low visibility of Medieval rural settlements in general is the size and degree of dispersal. We saw that some of the periods that are underrepresented in the archaeological atlas (the Bronze Age, the Hellenistic Period) were indeed characterized by very small and dispersed scatters.

Thus the fact that there are no finds securely dated prior to the 14th century in the area of Sopot could result from our inability to recognize this material, either during the course of fieldwork or during the processing of the finds. But even in case the survey area was inhabited in the centuries between the end of Antiquity and the 14th century, it is nearly certain that this long period was marked by a decline and contraction. The possible settlement was either very small or short-lived or it is situated on a presently inaccessible location. Recall that even the tiny assemblages dating to the Bronze Age and the Hellenistic Period left a recognizable pattern of distribution. This implies that the potential Medieval settlement is either small enough to remain hidden amidst the ceramic material from other periods or it is not represented in the surface record.

Despite the negative effects of the Black Death, the constant wars and political instability and the imminent threat of Ottoman invasion, the 14th century was a period of intensified building activity and settlement expansion³⁰². Many of the earlier towns received new fortification walls, incorporating novel architectural conceptions, imported from the Eastern Adriatic and Italy. These are the citadels of the modern towns of Skopje, Ohrid, Prilep and many others. Little was changed in their main architectural conception during the Ottoman Period, as they began to lose their military importance soon after the arrival of the Ottomans. Many new churches were built or completely renewed during the 14th century, even in its later decades, on the very eve of the Ottoman conquest³⁰³. More importantly these were not necessarily town churches. There were a number of newly built or fully reconstructed monastic churches in the countryside, lavishly dedicated with people and property. Numismatic finds from this century also indicate increased prosperity and intensified trade relations, especially with the Eastern

³⁰¹ B. Ristevski, 49-71, 2004; even on the Skopje citadel and the surrounding castles, glazed pottery is rare prior to the late 12th century and appears alongside the adoption of certain shapes of dining and drinking vessels. Cf. G.D.R. Sanders, Recent developments in the chronology of Byzantine Corinth, 385-399, eds. C.K. Williams II, N. Bookidis, *Corinth: the Centenary, 1896-1996*, Athens 2003.

³⁰² I. Mikulčić, 1996; in general, this is a period of decline in most regions of Greece, J. Bintliff, 395-398, 2012

³⁰³ A. Serafimova, *The Middle Ages 93-174, Macedonia; cultural heritage*, Skopje 1995.

Adriatic³⁰⁴. Other categories of archaeological finds, such as jewelry and certain types of table ware point to a developed local production³⁰⁵. Finally, and although pertaining to the northern parts of the Skopje Basin, there is a direct historic evidence of re-colonization in the early decades of the 14th century, under the Serbian King Milutin³⁰⁶. For some decades the survey area lied at the border between the receding Byzantine Empire and the expanding Serbian Kingdom. But by the second quarter of the 14th century, it certainly became a part of the Medieval Kingdom of Serbia and it shouldn't be excluded that similar actions were undertaken by Milutin's successors in the regions along the Middle Vardar Valley.

These rather general positive developments at least provide a vague context for the establishment of Late Medieval Sopot. As in many earlier periods, it seems that developments in the survey area resonate with broader, regional tendencies. Understandably until more comparative data are available, it is impossible to relate the local circumstances in one small micro-region to the general socio-historical climate. It is nevertheless certain that by the early 15th century, settlement in the survey area rose back to the rank of a larger hamlet or a small village. Like most of its predecessors, it spread over an area of about 1 hectare and its related material was largely confined to a single topographic unit (map III_65). In the case of Late Byzantine and Early Ottoman Sopot, this was the southwest corner of Prisoj's southern foothills.

Along with the majority of the villages in the neighbouring micro-regions, Sopot continued its existence and most probably prospered during the first few centuries of Ottoman rule. The published exhaustive censuses from the 15th century mention nearly all of the presently existing villages in the region surrounding the southern end of the Taor Gorge³⁰⁷. Sopot and many other villages were actually more populous than in the early decades of the 20th century. This fairly dense network of settlements must have been for the greater part established prior to the Ottoman conquest, for not too many new establishments are mentioned in the earliest censuses. With a few exceptions these were communities of peasant-serfs, usually featuring between 15 and 30 households. In the Early Ottoman Period, the village territories along with their entire communities were given to a feudal lord in exchange for military service, while in later centuries, they were gradually turned into hereditary properties³⁰⁸.

There is no contemporary parallel for the actual appearance of Late Byzantine and Early Ottoman Sopot. In later times villages of the *çiftlik* type usually consisted of two separate quarters; one for the peasant serfs, the other for the landlords or the estate manager³⁰⁹. At the same time this was also a religious segregation. The villages in the rugged landscapes surrounding the southern exit of the Taor Canyon were almost 100% Christian during the Early Ottoman Period. It is very unlikely, especially in the first couple of centuries of the Ottoman reign that the constantly warring feudal lords ever stayed in these villages. Local affairs were probably left to the village elders and the landlord visited the villages only to collect his levy³¹⁰. It seems that only in later centuries when the feudal land became hereditary did it become more common for the petty Ottoman landlords to build their houses near the Christian villages. Some

³⁰⁴ J. Kondijanov ed. *Numismatic collection of the National Bank of the Republic of Macedonia*, Skopje 1999.

³⁰⁵ E. Maneva, *Srednovekoven Nakit vo Makedonija*, Skopje 1992; B. Risteski 58-71, 2004.

³⁰⁶ T. Tomoski, *Skopskata oblast of XI do XIV vek*, 57-75, ed. V. Mošin, 1975.

³⁰⁷ M. Sokolovski, A. Stojanovski, 1973; M. Sokolovski, 1971.

³⁰⁸ A. Stojanovski, *Makedonija vo turskoto srednovekovie (XIV-XVIII vek)*, Skopje 1989; cf. J. Bintliff, 438-443, 467-469, 2012.

³⁰⁹ M. Filipović, 511, 1935; J. Bintliff, 467-469, 2012.

³¹⁰ A. Stojanovski, 66-67, 1989.

of these estates have survived until the beginning of the 20th century. Sopot too was a village of the *çiftlik* type and according to local oral tradition the two taller, tower-like structures in the modern village were actually the houses of the Ottoman landlords³¹¹. It is impossible to know if these or similar structures were actually contemporary with the Late Byzantine and Early Ottoman village, situated between 150 and 250 meters to the west-southwest. Nevertheless the positioning of the living quarters of the landlord on slightly higher ground and at a certain distance from the houses of the peasant serfs fits the descriptions of the *çiftlik* villages from later centuries³¹².

The great majority of the villages mentioned in the Early Ottoman censuses survived until the middle of the last century. However it's been generally accepted, especially among early 20th century ethnographers, that a number of villages changed their locations sometime during the late 18th or the early 19th century³¹³. This latest major shift in the settlement pattern is usually related to the serious decline of the state authority, especially felt by the communities in the more peripheral regions and along the major roads³¹⁴. It has to be stressed however that this process is espoused mostly on the bases of local oral tradition recorded by ethnographers in the early 20th century. The disappearance, relocation and breaking up of communities can also be related to the expansion of the *çiftlik*, the inherited estate at the expense of land that belonged to the fairly autonomous villages or land leased by the state in return for military service³¹⁵.

In the case of Sopot we observed only a minimal displacement, which couldn't be dated precisely. At an unknown point of time, the local community merely moved for about 150-250 meters to a more open and spacious location, occupying the living quarters of their former masters. But in principle the settlement remained within the limits of the same micro-topographic unit. A logical, albeit highly hypothetical explanation for this shift in settlement focus is the final demise of the Ottoman landlords and the appropriation of the land by the peasantry. However this would date the displacement not later than the mid-19th century, merely a few generations before the ethnographer Milenko Filipović visited the village. It is improbable that such an event passed unrecorded and it is even less likely that it was left out of the local spoken narratives. Either the abandonment of the old village took place much earlier and was forgotten by the inhabitants or more likely, it was a long-term, gradual process. Indeed the surface architectural evidence seems to indicate a gradual eastward movement of the village houses. A more precise dating of the ceramics will certainly help in resolving this issue.

The causes behind the relocation remain unknown. Apart from social transformations, this could also reflect changed standards of living and new agricultural practices. Finally one shouldn't exclude the possibility of a local population growth in the last century of the Ottoman Period. In this context it is unfortunate that we lack specific textual evidence for the period of the 18th and the 19th century. Some researchers have pointed to the possibility that the introduction of New World cultures and the slow development of a capitalist, market economy could have brought increased prosperity to the countryside³¹⁶. Indeed regional studies in southern and central Greece have revealed a period of increased demographic growth, especially during the

³¹¹ M.S. Filipović, 535, 1935.

³¹² Cf. map III_22 and J. Bintliff, fig. 21.5, 2012.

³¹³ M. Filipović, 509, 1935; a similar process has been observed in eastern Boeotia, but here it is confirmed through the study of later Ottoman censuses and it is dated much earlier, to the mid-17th century; J.L. Bintliff, 193-224, eds. A. Hurst, A Schachter, 1996.

³¹⁴ A. Stojanovski, 1974.

³¹⁵ J. L. Bintliff, 207-208, eds. A. Hurst, A Schachter, 1996.

³¹⁶ M.H. Jameson et al, 280, 1994.

second half of the 19th century³¹⁷. Although the general social and political conditions in the regions that remained under Ottoman rule were different, one shouldn't exclude the possibility that this was a major regional tendency.

In fact the surface archaeological evidence provides support for this thesis. The last couple of centuries were a period of intensified agricultural activity and a greater influx of goods produced in more distant towns. This cannot be solely related to the temporal proximity of the Late Ottoman-Early Modern village. The relatively dense and highly obtrusive carpet of ceramic fragments, including tile, a wide range of table, storage and transport vessels and spread across the entire basin of Sopot, must signal an increased wealth and investment in agricultural production. The distribution pattern of this material brought to the fields alongside organic manure bears a striking resemblance to the distribution of the Roman to Late Roman off-site carpet. In both examples the settlements were located on the western fringes of the colluvium at Prisoj's foot and the core of the productive land and the bulk of the off-site finds were located in the western survey half, only an ultra-thin carpet spreading east of the central valley (map III_66). This distribution pattern is not simply determined by the greater accessibility of the fields west of the central valley; it also marks the inner zone of intensive cultivation and gardening and the outer zone, characterized by a more extensive regime of exploitation³¹⁸. It is uncertain if this agricultural expansion is related to a population increase or to the slow commercialization of production and increased living standards. In most of the published Early and Mid-Ottoman censuses, Sopot has an equal or a greater number of families than in the 1930's. But because we lack population data for the 18th and the 19th century and a finer chronology for the surface finds, one shouldn't exclude the possibility that this gap conceals an episode of contraction and decline.

The final episode in the settlement history of the first survey area, the rapid decline and near abandonment of the village in the second half of the last century is not an isolated, local event. It is a process that can be followed in most regions of the country and one can see it as a part of a much wider migratory movements from villages to towns, characteristic for many parts of the Mediterranean in the late 19th and 20th century³¹⁹. Specifically in the Republic of Macedonia, as in most other former socialist countries on the Balkan Peninsula, it can be related to a number of aspects introduced through the radical social and economic reforms in the mid-20th century. One possible incentive to leave the rural sector was the abolishment of private property and the introduction of collective farming, though the issue can hardly be addressed without serious sociological studies. At the same time, towns and cities were being modernized at a much faster rate than the countryside and offered secure and more attractive job opportunities in the administrative and industrial sectors, better education, social and health care.

By the last quarter of the 20th century, the depopulation of the micro-regions along the southern end of the Taor Canyon was nearly completed. Most of the local inhabitants moved to the larger towns or left the country. Living conditions in this particular region are further aggravated by the bad communication and the lack of even the most basic supplies. At the time of the survey the smaller villages on the Vardar's left bank, including Sopot and the

³¹⁷ H. Forbes, Turkish and modern Methana, 101-117, eds. C. Mee, H. Forbes, 1997; B. Forsen, A. Karivieri, The Roman-Early Modern Periods: conclusions, 307-331, eds. J. Forsen, B. Forsen, et al. *The Asea Valley Survey: An Arcadian Mountain Valley from the Paleolithic Period until Modern Times*, Stockholm 2003; M. Wagstaff, The formation of the modern landscape of the survey area, 403-420, W. Cavanagh, J. Crouwel, R.W.V. Catling, G. Shipley et al. 2002; J. Bitniff, 478-497, 2012.

³¹⁸ Cf. J. Bintliff, P. Howard, A. Snodgrass, eds. 23-24, 2007.

³¹⁹ P. Horden, N. Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A study of Mediterranean history*, Oxford 2000.

neighbouring Vetersko and Novačani had but a few older inhabitants. There are several active households in the larger village Solb on the opposite bank of the Vardar, but these represent less than 10% of the village population in the first half of the 20th century³²⁰.

In fact it is possible that the last couple of decades witness the emergence of a new pattern of settlement. People begin to return to the countryside, though not on the sites of the abandoned villages. New houses can be seen in most of the emptied settlement niches, usually standing isolated and unrelated to the old village. During fieldwork we managed to establish contact with the newcomers, some of which informed us that they stay on a seasonal basis and for the purposes of cultivation of cash-crops (vines, walnuts) or bee-keeping. Likewise the owner of the sheep-farm located in the northwest corner of the old village territory is not a full-time resident of the village and the herds are chiefly looked after by shepherds, often hired from more distant regions. One could say that this is just another episode in the millennia-long history of settlement in the survey area, characterized by cycles of growth and contraction, nucleation and dispersal.

III.2.2 The dynamic of settlement in the survey area, the long-term trends and cycles, the carrying capacity

One characteristic feature of the local settlement history in the hinterland of Sopot was the constant dislocation of the central settlement³²¹. This dynamic was analyzed against the background of the topographic, geologic and pedologic divisions in the survey area and the distribution of freshwater sources. We also attempted to take into account the possible effect of local and regional communication lines and the proximity of political and ethnic frontiers.

The shifting of the settlements' locations between the eastern and western half of the valley was related to the global changes in the technological, economic and political environment. During the Neolithic the central settlement was located on the eastern bank of the valley, showing an obvious preference for the light, lacustrine soils that cover the eastern survey sectors. The introduction of animal traction and copper tools allowed the local communities to settle the more fertile western bank, while the re-occupation of the eastern bank during the Hellenistic Period was possibly caused by the insecure political conditions. But it proved trickier to offer a reasonable interpretation for the settlement displacement within the area of the western bank.

The location of site 5a seems to have been particularly favored. It was occupied during at least three periods in the past. This isn't a noticeable point in the landscape; it is merely a corner of Prisoj's southern foothills. The settlements that occupied this location were practically clinging on to the edge of the arable territory. Looking at the locations of other settlement sites, such as site 6 or 7, it becomes clear that in principle, they differ little from site 5a. Site 7 occupies the opposite, northeast corner of Prisoj's southern foot, while site 6 was built in the very centre of this micro-topographic unit. One may view the location of site 8 in the same context. Because of its size and better physical articulation, it admittedly differs from the sites at Prisoj's southern foot. It too however gravitates around the southern foothills, although it occupies a different micro-topographic unit. Here one has to distinguish between the Late Iron Age settlement and the small Late Roman farm, occupying a small part of the same site. In the

³²⁰ M. Filipović, 544-546, 1935.

³²¹ Cf. H. Lehmann, Die Siedlungsraeume Ostkretas, 212-238, *Geographische Zeitschrift* 45, 1939, after M. Gkiasta, *The Historiography of Landscape Research on Crete*, 72-75, Leiden 2008.

former case, the entire eastern foothills are turned into a settlement, while the main focus of agricultural production was at the southern foot and also possibly on the valley floor. The Late Roman farm on the other hand, features a location analogous to that of site 6. It occupies the centre of the neighbouring, smaller micro-topographic unit, exploiting the narrow strip of fertile land at Prisoj's eastern foot, in effect the area occupied by the dwellings of the Late Iron Age settlement. Evidently all settlement sites on the western bank, with the exception of the Late Roman farm on site 8, gravitate around Prisoj's southern foothills. The advantage of site 5a perhaps lies in the presence of a freshwater spring in its immediate vicinity, although sites 8 and 7 also had a quick access to a source on the valley floor, 150-200 meters away.

But the advantages of site 5a become apparent, once we look at the settlements relations to local and regional lines of communication that pass through the survey area. Understandably all settlements were aligned by local roads; the main difference being that some of these were sections of larger regional roads, while others were merely local lateral roads that joined the village with the fields in the peripheral parts of the micro-region. In this respect site 5a stands apart from the rest of the sites, because it is located at the very exit of the micro-region, by the road that leads northwards, passing over the top of the rocky, eastern side of the Taor Canyon. This is difficult and treacherous terrain, cut by numerous ravines with vertical sides, but it is the shortest route connecting the plain of Veles and the southern periphery of the Skopje Basin. An easier, but longer road passes over three kilometers to the east, avoiding the narrow canyons and the survey area. But even without a state-sponsored interregional road, the location of site 5a is strategically important. It overlooks the western gate of the surveyed micro-region. Whether going northwards along the top of the canyon or westwards, into the Vardar Valley floor, one has to pass by site 5a. Site 7 and especially site 8 are much more sheltered in this respect. They are aligned on a local road that leads along the central valley, towards its upper course and ultimately to Vetersko. In a sense sites 7 and 8 are situated in a recess, keeping a certain distance from the main east-west axis of this micro-region (map III_67).

Following this line of reasoning it is possible to group nearly all discovered sites into two categories, depending on their proximity to the main transversal in the survey area. On the one hand, sites 5a-5b, 6, 11, 13a-13b are all situated in the immediate vicinity of this line; on the other, sites 7, 8, 12 and 14 were either deliberately avoiding this alignment or were simply indifferent to it. The site of the Late Byzantine to Early Ottoman village (site 4) is to a certain degree ambiguous. It too is aligned along the east-west transversal, but unlike the first group, it occupies lower ground and a more sheltered location. More specifically it stands by a local road, leading eastwards from the floor of the Vardar and passing at Gaber's northern foot. This route must have had some kind of wider regional importance, because it connected the villages on the Vardar's right bank with the Veles Basin. The remains of the small tower on the Vardar's left bank testify that this was one of the rare points in the Taor Canyon where it was possible to cross the river. In any case this wasn't a major interregional transversal, but a regional road, offering a direct link between the Vardar's right bank and the Veles Basin. In this context it should be stressed that the location of the Late Ottoman-Early Modern site is obviously more exposed and belongs to the first group of sites.

The three forts that delimit the survey area also differ regarding their relation to the east-west axis. Apparently the fort over the monastic complex and the newly discovered one on site 10 stand at the extremes of the main axis. Their very presence could be explained by the significance of this transversal. The small fort on site 9 on the other hand, guards the local north-south road, leading along the central valley. Hidden in the small valley between the two massifs

of Prisoj and Radičica, it could effectively act as a refugium for the community that inhabited this micro-region.

To sum up, there is one group of sites that forms a chain almost perfectly aligned by the main east-west axis, occupying very open and exposed locations and another group, almost randomly dispersed to the north and south of the main axis and usually occupying sheltered and topographically more articulate locations. The small Bronze Age farm discovered in the yard of the monastic complex definitely belongs to the latter group. Up until the construction of the first Skopje-Thessalonica railway in the 1870's, this section of the Vardar Valley could hardly have been used for travelling longer distances along the river banks. Because long stretches of the Taor Canyon are impassible, the narrow river terraces are in effect isolated islands of flat, cultivable land, communicating only with their hinterlands and in certain cases, with the opposite bank.

The different positioning of the sites in relation to natural communication lines puts the dynamic of settlement displacement in an interesting perspective. While in certain periods of the past proximity to the main, east-west route was apparently preferred, in others it was either avoided or was perceived as irrelevant. During the Roman and especially the Late Roman Period, when there is an obvious diversification of sites regarding function, both types of locations were occupied. Given that site 9 was truly acting as a refugium at this time, the main settlements could readily be moved away from their exposed locations on the east-west axis; the two alternate patterns of settlement were virtually coexistent.

Thus along with the distribution of the basic natural resources and population size, major, interregional lines of communication were the third determining factor in the local settlement history. Proximity to the main east-west transversal would firstly indicate that it was possibly functioning as a section of a major interregional road and secondly, that living conditions in the wider region were relatively stable. Avoidance or disconnection from this transversal would either indicate that it lost its significance, other factors becoming more pressing or that living conditions were becoming more precarious. The fact that the local settlement shifted close to and away from the main axis, almost alternately from period to period, probably reflects the changing importance of the Vardar Valley road through the past (table 1). Understandably the maintenance of an active transversal along this section of the Vardar would by itself require stable social conditions or a stronger central authority, though its inactivity wouldn't necessarily imply the opposite.

Table III_1: Location of the central settlements in relation to the main east-west axis

Period	Exposed/Sheltered
Mid-Neolithic	Exposed
Late Neolithic	Exposed
Bronze Age	Sheltered
L. Bronze Age	Sheltered
LBA-EIA	Sheltered?
E Iron Age	Exposed
L Iron Age	Sheltered
Hellenistic	Sheltered
R-L. Roman	Exposed
LByz-EOtt	Sheltered
LO-EM	Exposed

But a cautionary remark is necessary at this point, because the existence of major interregional roads doesn't have to be solely reflected in the positioning of the settlement sites in relation to natural corridors. Settlement sites are but one component of the human landscape and while settlement location can indicate retreat from the main natural corridor, further implying precarious living conditions or decline of the corridor's importance in the interregional road network, the locations of other components of the landscape such as military posts, sanctuaries or cemeteries can reflect a very different attitude. Apart from the Roman-Late Roman period when the two patterns existed side by side, the Late Iron Age remains present another instructive example. By its location site 8, the main settlement of this period, clearly belongs to the group of settlements situated away from the main east-west axis. This would imply that security was an important concern for the local community or that the road leading through the Vardar Valley lost its importance during this period. However the positioning of the mound necropolis on the top of the Radičica Ridge, the eastern limit of the basin, clearly demonstrates that this was hardly the case. The string of mounds reaches to the eastern entrance into the Sopot Basin and it would have been visible to anyone leaving or entering the region.

Thus while not fully undermining the usefulness of this type of analysis, this example calls for a careful weighing of the existing evidence prior to jumping into premature conclusions. Unlike in the case of the Roman-Late Roman and the Late Iron Age settlements, non-residential sites are not always visible in the surface archaeological record. Moreover it is more likely than not that there will be cases of ambiguously located settlement sites, which can neither be classed as sheltered, nor as exposed. Site 7 nicely illustrates this case: although situated at a certain distance from the main transversal and classed into the category of "sheltered" sites, it has a fairly imposing location while some of its satellite clusters were aligned along the same east-west axis that joined sites 5a-5b, 6, 11 and 13a-13b.

Clearly if we are to study the impact of interregional communications, political and administrative frontiers on local settlement, it will be essential to secure independent archaeological evidence for the existence of such supra-regional phenomena. The evidence presently available is simply too scant to establish the exact route of the Via Axia or the provincial frontier between Macedonia and Moesia. They are not described in the historical records and we are ignorant about their associated manifestations in the archaeological record. Until more substantial data is secured, we can only analyze the locational preferences of

settlements in relation to local and regional roads and the geometry of the surrounding landscape. In this sense the analysis elaborated in the preceding paragraphs is essentially valid, although the constant shifting of the central settlement on and off the main east-west axis doesn't necessarily reflect the activity of a major interregional road or general social and economic conditions³²².

Another one of the more constant features of the local history of habitation was the size of the settlement (graph III_1). To be sure, determining the size and the character of the sites proved to be a rather elusive affair. Whether because of inconsistencies during fieldwork, potential faults in the processing of the finds or because of technical problems, it wasn't always possible to draw the exact limits of the sites. In these cases the reading of the survey results was inevitably ambiguous and we had to offer alternative interpretations.

Closely related to the determining of the size of the local settlements on the basis of the surface record is their degree of dispersal, but also the sharpness of the chronological resolution. As we saw, during most periods in the past the remains of local settlement consisted of one central cluster and a number of smaller satellites. Only the Middle Neolithic material was found completely limited to the area of the central settlement. The assemblage datable to the Early Iron Age also behaves differently, because the material was found distributed in two, almost equally large clusters. Also somewhat specific is the distribution of the Late Bronze-Early Iron Age assemblage. Although it too consisted of one central and several satellite clusters, the latter were slightly larger and denser than the satellite clusters dating to other periods. In other periods despite the dispersal, there was an evident occupational focus, a central scatter, usually much larger and denser than its satellites. Understandably this makes the task of drawing the limits of the actually occupied zone rather delicate.

Periods characterized by a more nucleated settlement present a no lesser problem when it comes to determining settlement size. In cases where the material is distributed in more than one, equally large clusters, there emerges the question of their exact chronology. Because of the poor understanding of the chronology of the material, it is impossible to know if these were contemporary or consecutive establishments. Such was the case with the finds from the Bronze Age, the Early Iron Age and the Roman Period. As shown on graph III_1, this makes a considerable difference when discussing settlement size. For example, given that the small Late Roman farm on site 8 was established after the central settlement on site 5a-5b was abandoned, it would imply a completely unperceived episode in the local settlement history at the end of Antiquity, marked by a drastic contraction of settlement and a new relocation away from the main transeversal.

But regardless of all the uncertainties, a number of facts were clearly established. In most periods when the survey area was inhabited, the main settlement varied between the ranks of a farm and a hamlet. The size of the intensely occupied areas could range from several hundreds square meters to slightly over 1 hectare. Nevertheless the prevalent tendency is to have settlements of the rank of a hamlet, measuring between 7-8 000 sq meters and 1 hectare. Only in certain periods, such as the Bronze Age and possibly the Hellenistic, was the area occupied by isolated farms, stretching over not more than 1-2 000 sq meters. At the other extreme stands the Late Iron Age settlement. By the 7th century BC, the central settlement in the survey area moved to a new location, nearly quadrupling in size. At least 3.6 hectares were occupied and there were surface remains in all western sectors of the survey area. It is impossible to understand this sudden expansion of settlement and the subsequent and equally drastic contraction solely on the

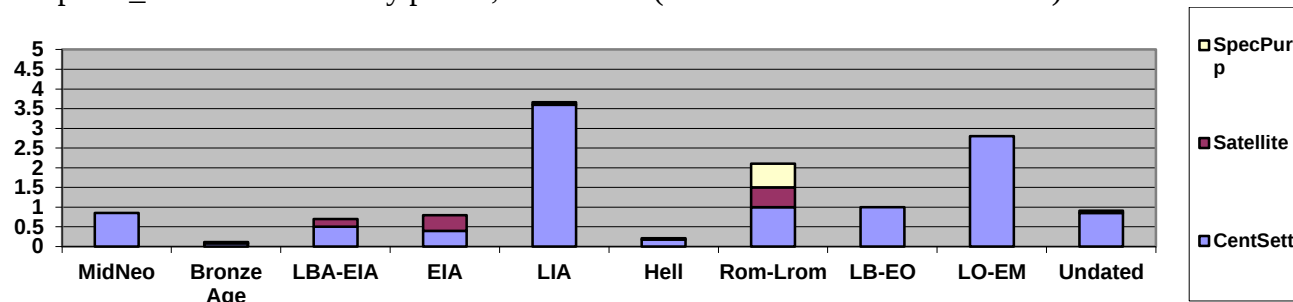
³²² Cf. H. Bowden, D. Gill, 77-83, eds. C. Mee, H. Forbes, 1997; where the shifting of settlement on and off the coast line is seen as signaling increased or deteriorating security on the sea.

basis of internal developments. Similar to the regional pattern of the Middle Neolithic, the Late Iron Age centre near Sopot was lying on the edge of a wider network of contemporary settlements, but its appearance in this small and peripheral micro-region remains a mystery.

There is also an apparent increase of the total site area during the Roman-Late Roman and the Late Ottoman-Early Modern periods. As explained in a number of occasions, the remains from these periods represent a special case. A considerable portion of the combined areas of the Roman sites is comprised of scatters of brick and tile. They don't comprise full domestic assemblages and this feature distinguished them from sites with clear traces of full residential activities. Excluding these sites from the total occupied area and assuming that the central settlement on site 5a-5b was contemporary with the smaller satellite on site 8, the Roman Period brought only a slight expansion of settlement. The combined areas of sites 5a-5b and 8 measure about 1.3 hectares. However if we add sites 13a-13b, 14 and 15, the total occupied area will increase to slightly over 2 hectares. Taking into account the evidence for intensified agricultural exploitation, this isn't unlikely. It must be stressed however that as in all earlier periods, the individual Roman to Late Roman settlements didn't exceed the ranks of farms and hamlets.

On the other hand, the increased size of the Late Ottoman-Early Modern settlement doesn't agree with the written records relating to the number of households in the village. According to the textual evidence, Late Ottoman-Early Modern Sopot had roughly the same number of inhabitants as its Early Ottoman predecessor, but it occupied a three times greater area. It was suggested that this doesn't necessarily reflect an increase in population, but rather a change in social relations, living standards and agricultural economy.

Graph III_1: total site areas by period, in hectares (the area of the castra excluded).



It is important to briefly examine the significance of the various conditions that favoured this stability concerning settlement and population size. Throughout its long history of human habitation, the basin of Sopot was either inhabited by a single extended family or clan or by tiny, closely knit communities of not more than 30 households. The considerable expansions during the Late Iron Age and also possibly during the Roman-Late Roman Period seem to suggest that environmental factors alone couldn't have constrained the development of a larger settlement in the survey area. Although the Late Iron Age expansion was a unique and relatively brief episode, the fact that this settlement existed for at least two centuries indicates that during most periods represented in the surface record, the population size was below the maximum carrying capacity of the surveyed area. It is nevertheless possible that during the Late Iron Age, Sopot was a major regional centre, partly relying on the agricultural products from neighbouring micro-region. It is therefore important to try and examine the agricultural potential of the survey area and its impact on the size of local settlement.

This subject was partly addressed in the description of the survey area, in Chapter II. There are two major problems standing in our way. First is the absence of published studies dealing specifically with the agricultural potential of the Sopot Basin or the wider region of the upper Mid-Vardar. We therefore have to rely on the scattered evidence collected by early ethnographers, the reports (mostly unpublished and difficult to find) of regional soil studies and traces of earlier agricultural activities visible on the ground or on aerial photographs. But while it is possible to roughly determine the size of the cultivable land, we are not in a position to estimate the agricultural potential of the area in terms of kg of grain per hectare. Nevertheless one can predict that the productivity of the agricultural land along the Vardar Valley is equal or slightly higher in comparison to the regions of central and southern Greece³²³. The region is characterized by greater humidity, though soil stability must have presented a serious problem, especially along certain sections of the Middle Vardar Valley. For the purposes of this analysis, we will assume that the minimum a family needed to secure its basic subsistence needs were about 3.5 hectares of farming land³²⁴. Normally however, (and in view of the mixed agro-pastoral economy of later historic periods, when a certain portion of the agricultural land must have been reserved for animal fodder) the individual estates of independent families were certainly larger.

The second problem is related to the more general issue of what proportion of the territory actually exploited by the settlement falls within the limits of the survey area. Because of the character of the local topography, settlements aren't necessarily positioned in the centre of their territories, nor are their territories equivalent to an orographic or a hydrographic entity. The Roman to Late Roman sites situated in the eastern periphery of the survey area are particularly problematic, because more than half of their land could belong to the neighbouring drainage of the Vranov Dol. It is also nearly certain that the agricultural territory of the settlements in sector I didn't belong to the surveyed basin and was probably spread on the Vardar's right bank. In this context we further need to stress the fact that we remain ignorant of the specifics of the local agricultural economy in nearly all periods of occupation represented in the surface record. Analyzing the distribution of the Ottoman to Early Modern settlement in the broader region of the second survey area, we will see that this peripheral positioning of settlements could reflect a careful economic strategy of securing equal access to a variety of natural resources.

In order to avoid this problem, it might be useful to draw theoretical boundaries around the peripherally positioned settlement sites. We can do this following the principles established by the site catchment concept³²⁵. The central tenet of this theory is that there is a natural limit to the territory exploited by all pre-industrial societies. Depending on the general type of the economy, hunting and gathering, pastoralist or farming, the radius of the settlement's or the camp's territory can range between 10 and 5 kilometers. The exploitation of natural resources situated beyond these limits becomes economically unviable, because of the increased time-costs of traveling to and back from the production locus on a daily basis. In practice when farming communities in Greece and the Balkans are considered, the empirical evidence suggests that

³²³ M.H. Jameson et al. 280-285, 1994; van Berghem, J-W Fiselier, J. Soils and Land Use Potential, 57-71; W. Cavanagh, J. Crouwel, R.W.V. Catling, G. Shipley et al. 2002; R. Shiel, A. Stewart, The soils and agricultural potential of the Thespias area, 95-109, J. Bintliff, P. Howard, A. Snodgrass et al, 2007.

³²⁴ M. H. Jameson et al. 283, 1994; J. Bintliff, P. Howard, A. Snodgrass et al, 107-108, 143-151, 2007; cf. R.W.V. Catling, The Survey Area from the Early Iron Age to the Classical Period (1050-300), 151-256; W. Cavanagh, J. Crouwel, R.W.V. Catling, G. Shipley et al. 2002.

³²⁵ E.S. Higgs, C. Vita-Finzi, 1-37, 1970; J. Bintliff, 505-513, ed. G. Barker, 1999.

shorter radii of 2-3 kilometers or half an hour walk on flat terrain are more common³²⁶. It is been estimated that a territory with a radius of 2-3 kilometers is sufficiently large to sustain a community of a few thousand people or settlements of the rank of large villages or small towns. This already implies that the farms and hamlets in the basin of Sopot required much smaller territories to secure their subsistence needs. Even in the rugged landscape of the upper Mid-Vardar Valley, where it is very likely that a large portion of the theoretical territory is not cultivable, an area of over a dozen square kilometers will by far exceed the needs of the small farming communities.

But simply drawing buffer zones around the settlements in the first survey area will hardly be of any help, because of the extremely fragmented and rugged terrain. For example, it is obvious that the settlements on sites 4 or 5a-b didn't exploit with equal intensity the land on the left and the right bank of the Vardar, although the latter consumed over 50% of their theoretical territories. This portion of the potential hinterland was cut off by the deep Taor Canyon and the walking distance to the Vardar's right bank could extend to over 1 km. Obviously these small hamlets could comfortably procure their needs from the land east of the Vardar, but again, merely drawing buffer zones with smaller radii doesn't solve the problem, because we saw that the great majority of the sites were located on the periphery of the farmland (map III_68). In order to carry out this analysis, it will be necessary to work with time-distance rather than with linear distances and create a 3-dimensional model of the survey area. As this is unavailable, for the present purpose we will have to follow the obvious topographic divisions of the area. In practice this means treating all hill-sides and ravines as simple physical barriers, although it is known that even these uncultivable sections of the landscape were exploited for certain resources. In this particular case however, it is evident that the dry and barren hill-side was of little economic value. Apart from being used as extensive grazing grounds during the months prior to the harvest season, the hills separating the drainages of the Sopot, the Vardar and the Vranov Dol offered few other resources, including wood, various herbs and wild fruits³²⁷.

Because of the specific distribution of the settlements in the first survey, we will have to establish the approximate carrying capacity of three different areas (map III_69). The first is located outside the drainage of the central valley, on the Vardar Valley floor. It includes the terraces on the Vardar's left bank (our sector I) and the low-land area on the opposite bank, around the confluence of the Solpski Stream and the Vardar. This niche was occupied by a small Bronze Age settlement, while in the more recent past there was a small hamlet on the Vardar's right bank and the monastic complex on the opposite eastern bank. It is also certain that there were activities during the Roman to Late Roman Period, but these weren't necessarily residential. The second area coincides with the central valley and its drainage. It is much larger and encompasses the territories of the great majority of settlements discovered in this survey area. Finally, the third area is in part theoretical, spreading over the eastern half of the drainage of Sopot and over the western half of the neighbouring Vranov Dol. This is the hypothetical territory of the Roman to Late Roman settlement on site 13a-13b. But even here a more flexible approach is needed, because given that this settlement was contemporary with site 5a-5b, its potential territory on the west will be limited by the hinterland of its larger neighbour. Situated at a distance of about 1.5 kilometers and surrounded by extensive stretches of inhospitable and barren terrain on the north and west, the only agricultural land available to the communities that

³²⁶ J. Bintliff, 513-518, ed. G. Barker, 1999.

³²⁷ O. Rackham, *Observations on the historical ecology of Laconia*, 73-119, W. Cavanagh, J. Crouwel, R.W.V. Catling, G. Shipley et al. 2002.

occupied site 5a-5b would have been the surveyed basin. This implies that the bulk of the agricultural land belonging to the inhabitants of site 13a-13b fell within the drainage of the neighbouring stream, the Vranov Dol and was left outside of the survey area.

The tiny island of fertile land spreading on both sides of the Vardar, near its confluence with the Solpski Stream is covered with fertile soils derived from flysch and alluvial sediments. In addition this land has some regional strategic importance, because it is one of the rare spots where the Vardar can be crossed in the Taor Canyon. However the arable land available, including the low hills on the Vardar's right bank totals a maximum of about 25 hectares. This niche could sustain not more than several families, assuming that they owned humble properties, occupying slightly over 3 hectares of farmland. This suggestion is confirmed both by the census data for the Ottoman village Vlahčani situated on the Vardar's right bank³²⁸ and by the surface survey results. According to the official records of the Early Ottoman Period, Vlahčani was a small hamlet, consisting of not more than 10 households. It should be stressed however that the territory of these settlement was probably confined to the western bank of the Vardar, as the narrow terraces on the opposite bank were a monastic land. Thus it is possible that at least during certain periods, the left and the right bank of the Vardar didn't form a single settlement niche. The narrow terraces on the left bank could barely sustain a single household. Even if assuming that 100% of the cultivable land was exploited and deducing 0.1 hectares for the occupied area, the maximum amount of farmland in this sector measures about 3.7 hectares. The surface artifact survey revealed that in the Bronze Age and possibly the Late Bronze Age, the site of the modern monastery was indeed occupied by a small farm, measuring less than 0.1 hectares.

As explained earlier the basin of Sopot is a well enclosed hydrographic entity, surrounded on all sides by low, but rather extensive and rugged hill masses. Because this is a geologically dynamic region, it is often difficult to draw the exact limits of the watershed line, especially along the northern periphery of the basin. Nevertheless in chapter II, on the basis of very detailed military topographic maps, we estimated that the valley drains about 10 sq kilometers. Only a very small fraction of this land is cultivable, almost entirely concentrated on the terraces and the floor of the central valley. The modern plough-zone spreads over half of this potentially arable land and measures about 80 hectares, roughly overlapping with the intensively surveyed area. But judging by the vegetation patterns and the remains of old agricultural terraces visible on the ground and on aerial photographs, at certain points in time, the agricultural potential of this region was more fully exploited. There are clear traces of agricultural activities (old hedges and terraces) along the eastern periphery of the survey area, on the western foot of Radičica and in the upper course of the central valley. Taking into account these peripheral zones of the landscape, the size of the potentially cultivable land increases to about 230 hectares: 143.5 along the middle and the lower course of the valley, 83.3 hectares along the upper course. In addition there are also traces of agricultural activity on the upper portion of Prisoj, but these are scattered fields amounting to 11 or 12 hectares of poor land. Thus the potentially arable land in the basin of Sopot totals about 240 hectares or 2.4 sq kilometers. It has to be stressed that in terms of agricultural potential, there are considerable variations across different sections of the landscape. The land east of the central valley and in its upper course was apparently less productive than the land west of the central valley, at Prisoj's foot and on the valley floor. The thin soils covering the upper portions of Prisoj or the western slope of Radičica were probably the least attractive, not least because of the difficulty of access and the dangers of failed harvests due to low

³²⁸ M. Sokolovski, 183, 1971.

precipitation. It is no doubt unfortunate that there is no precise information concerning the agricultural productivity of the different sections of the agricultural land.

Like the (contemporary?) settlement on site 5a-5b, the Roman to Late Roman sites 13a-13b, 14 and 15 stand on a watershed line, at the opposite eastern end of the basin. They occupy the Jakupica Ridge, which separates the basins of Sopot and the neighbouring stream to the east, the Vranov Dol. Theoretically these sites had an equal access to both valleys, but given that most of the lower half of the basin of Sopot was exploited by site 5a-5b, the bulk of their agricultural territory had to belong to the drainage of the Vranov Dol. This stream flows through a slightly larger valley, with more arable land. Only on the right bank of the Vranov Dol there is over 1 sq kilometer of low-lying terrain, covered with relatively fertile Tertiary deposits. These are the same sediments that cover the eastern half of the surveyed basin, although the local soils are better preserved than in the basin of Sopot³²⁹. At present the entire lower half of the Vranov Dol is under vineyards. The terrain lies within 15 to 20 minutes walking distance from sites 13a-13b and its direct exploitation doesn't present a particular problem. With over 100 hectares of good arable land, it could sustain a settlement as large as the one on site 5a-5b. In fact only the northern end of this stretch, the fields north of the Skopje-Thessalonica highway and located in the immediate vicinity of sites 13a-13b, offer nearly 35 hectares of productive land. Thus a very small hamlet consisting of 6-7 families, each cultivating between 5 and 6 hectares or a substantial farm could comfortably live off the immediate surroundings of sites 13a-13b. We find it unlikely that the settlement on this site exploited the entire western bank of the Vranov Dol. The exact size of this site remained undefined, although it is clear that it didn't occupy an area larger than site 5a-5b. The view that this site didn't exploit the entire western bank of the lower Vranov Dol primarily derives from its location in the surrounding landscape, although this was also indicated by the relatively low artifact density and the character of the material. These sites are fairly detached from the lower half of the neighbouring valley and although they occupy the watershed line between the basin of Sopot and the Vranov Dol, they evidently gravitate towards the former, especially the component on site 13a, sites 14 and 15. The eastern foot of the hillock occupied by site 10 or the ridge on the opposite bank, represent far more suitable bases for the exploitation of the Vranov Dol.

What are the implications of this analysis for the population dynamic in our survey area? Given that a property of about 3.5 hectares is the minimum required to feed a single family, the estimated agricultural potential of the basin of Sopot can sustain a maximum of 66-67 households. This however hardly leaves any space for fallowing or the cultivation of fodder. If we allow that a portion of the cultivable land was given away to animal fodder or was left uncultivated and increase the minimum agricultural estate to about 5.5 hectares, the carrying capacity of this micro-region drops to not more than 45 families. These generally accepted minimum quanta of farmland for traditional agriculturalists are actually much lower in comparison to the scanty information pertaining to the region of the upper Mid-Vardar in the first half of the 20th century³³⁰. According to this ethnographic account, the average peasant farmers in the neighbouring villages owned about 50 *dunums* or 8 hectares of farmland. As the author himself admits however, the particular timing of the ethnographic survey, immediately after World War I was probably misleading, because the majority of the peasant-farmers in the country amassed substantial expanses of arable land from the fleeing Ottomans in the early decades of the 20th century. Indeed as the author remarks, a great portion of this land laid

³²⁹ Gj. Tanev, 1969.

³³⁰ M. Filipović, 503, 1935.

uncultivated, because the local farmers simply lacked the labour force and the means to exploit it. In some of the villages, the informants remembered that prior to the retreat of the Ottomans, the poorer farmers owned five times smaller estates or barely 2 hectares of arable land. It is unlikely that an estate of this size could sustain a family of four and this information must relate to the Late Ottoman Period, when the majority of the peasants worked on the estates of the local landlords.

Turning to the size of the local communities inferred from the survey results, we see that during most periods in the past population levels were below the maximum carrying capacity of the area. Obviously the over 200 hectares of potential agricultural land was far above the needs and the production capacity of the communities that inhabited the Bronze Age and Hellenistic farmsteads. It is certain that during these periods, only a small fraction of the cultivable land was being exploited. But even the predominant settlement rank in this survey area, the hamlet measuring between 0.5 and 1 hectare didn't stretch the agricultural potential of the basin to its limits. Assuming that these settlements housed between 15 and 30 households³³¹, their basic subsistence needs could easily be met by focusing the agricultural production only on the lower and the middle course of the central valley. Even if we accept the upper limit of 30 households (which was the maximum recorded in the mid-15th century Ottoman censuses), each family could cultivate over 4.5 hectares. Given that the entire basin was under cultivation (which according to the site catchment theory was technically possible), the estates of the individual households will increase to 8 hectares. This sharply matches the figures reported by farmers from the neighbouring villages in the period between the two world wars. It is thus clear that during most of the local settlement history, the small farming communities could comfortably live off the land available in the immediate vicinity of the central settlements, i.e. the lower and the middle course of the central valley or the western bank of the Vranov Dol. Even here a portion of the land available could be given away to a less intensive regime or pastures. Indeed this is what the survey data suggest: evidence of less intensive, off-site activity was almost always limited to a single survey section, in the immediate surroundings of the settlement. If these halos spreading for a couple of hundreds of meters beyond the site peripheries mark an area of intensive agriculture and gardening, it could be that the remaining land was less intensively exploited. A similar pattern of land-use was documented by M. Filipović in the early decades of the last century: wheat, vines and garden cultures in the immediate vicinity of the village houses and on the valley floor, rye, barley and occasionally millet on the more distant fields and along the upper portions of the surrounding hills³³².

The only period when the agricultural resources of the surveyed basin were becoming perilously strained was the Late Iron Age. Again the data inferred from the surface artifact survey and the estimates concerning the agricultural potential of the surveyed basin aren't contradictory. Assuming that the entire basin, including the poorer soils in the hillside was under cultivation and allowing for very small estates, not larger than 3 hectares, a maximum of 80 household could live off this land during the Late Iron Age. However this would be an impossible regime, for it not only consumes the entire productive land leaving no room for fallow and pastures, but it also doesn't take into account the fact that the area of the extensive mound necropolis and the 3.6 hectares occupied by the settlement were left out of the plough-

³³¹ This is a rather generous estimate, at least for certain historic periods, cf. J. Bintliff, P. Howard, A. Snodgrass, et al. 144-145, 2007; cf. R.W.V. Catling, 205-211, W. Cavanagh, J. Crouwel, R.W.V. Catling, G. Shipley et al. 2002.

³³² M. Filipović, 502-507, 1935.

zone. If we deduce the 15 hectares occupied by the settlement and the mound necropolis from the sum of the potentially arable land and allow for larger individual estates, closer to the 5.5 hectares limit, the maximum number of households will shrink to about 50; a figure which is still substantially higher than in all other periods of human occupation in the survey area, but slightly lower than suggested by the survey results. It is possible that we've slightly overestimated the size of the Late Iron Age community, but even if we agree that it comprised not more than 50 households, it is evident that the agricultural potential of the area was becoming exhausted. In fact a community of 50 households could still live off the land without overstraining its resources, though it would imply that the entire agricultural potential of the basin was used. One shouldn't exclude the possibility that this limit was actually crossed at a certain point of time during the Late Iron Age and that for a generation or two, the natural resources of this micro-region were becoming truly overexploited. This could indeed be one of the central reasons behind the sudden demise of the Late Iron Age village.

The Roman to Late Roman Period also requires a brief reconsideration in the light of the estimated carrying capacity of the survey area and its surroundings. If we assume that the majority of the possible settlement sites from this long period were at least partly contemporary, the total occupied area increases to slightly over 2 hectares. In terms of population size, this is still below the productive limits of the basin of Sopot, even if we make a further assumption that these were all nucleated settlements housing a total of between 30 and 40 households. However the distribution of the Roman to Late Roman settlement sites is not ideally suited for the exploitation of the surrounding landscape. They are all situated in the lower half of the surveyed basin and even site 13a-13b is closer to the central valley than to the fertile eastern bank of the Vranov Dol. Agricultural exploitation of the peripheral upper course of the central valley or the banks of the Vranov Dol is still viable, although it would be logical to discover at least one of the settlement sites in these zones. We believe that this clustering of sites in the lower and middle course of the central valley, once again reinforces the impression that the Roman to Late Roman Period didn't bring a particularly strong population increase. It merely saw a return to the earlier, pre-Late Iron Age population levels. The increased settlement area could reflect a change in the standards of living in the countryside; we know that during the Roman and Late Roman Periods, individual farms could easily occupy several thousand square meters³³³. With the possible exception of site 5a-5b, the rest of the sites were almost certainly individual farms or outbuildings with agricultural functions. In fact this could be one of the factors contributing to the relatively low on-site densities, even on locations where prehistoric material was present in much larger quantities. It also implies that the intensified agricultural exploitation evidenced by the appearance of a very thin off-site carpet wasn't necessarily incited by local demographic pressures.

The calculating of the survey area's agricultural potential basically confirms what was anticipated in our earlier discussions concerning the size of the local community; in particular, the evident tendency to stabilize around the limit of 100 to 150 individuals. As shown on graph III_1, over half of the settlements discovered in this survey area measured between 0.5 and 1 hectare. Further growth was evidently unconstrained by the local agricultural potential, but there was another underlining factor, identified by physical anthropology a couple of decades ago³³⁴. These small farming communities could continue their existence as largely egalitarian (that is

³³³ Cf. J. Bintliff, P. Howard, A. Snodgrass, et al. sites THS 3, THS 4, 2007.

³³⁴ R.I.M. Dunbar, Coevolution of Neo-cortex size, group size and language in humans, 681-735, *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 16 (4)1993; J.L. Bintliff, 526-532, ed. G. Barker, 1999.

lacking formal vertical or horizontal subdivisions) and exogamous, as long as their population remained below or close to the threshold of 150 individuals. The analysis of the carrying capacity of the wider study region demonstrated that the small agricultural potential of the basin of Sopot precluded the emergence of a larger, corporate community. Its land could barely sustain a population of 300 and it is now clear that even the Late Iron Age settlement didn't exceed the hamlet-rank. But although the limited agricultural potential of the region prevented the emergence of a larger settlement, it was social factors that kept the population at an even lower level.

Without the more refined pottery chronology, we remain ignorant about the settlement dynamic during the separate periods of occupation. For example, we don't know if the Late Bronze-Early Iron Age hamlet developed gradually from a settlement of a lower rank or if its foundation consisted of one or more episodes of colonization. Likewise we can only guess what happened with the local settlements at the end of nearly all periods of occupation, the only exception being the Late Ottoman-Early Modern Period. Apart from the Late Iron Age, there is no evidence in the surface archaeological record that would suggest the existence of phases during which the settlements grew beyond the threshold of 15-30 households. This means that the local communities had fairly efficient mechanisms of controlling population growth and that environmental and demographic pressures weren't the decisive factors for the demise and relocation of subsequent settlements.

Evidently there aren't too many gaps in the local history of habitation, a fact which nicely demonstrates the stability of the surveyed basin as a settlement niche. Nevertheless certain time periods such as the Early Neolithic, the Eneolithic, but also much of the Middle Ages, left no recognizable traces in the surface record. Even allowing the possibility that some evidence was overlooked or misinterpreted, it seems likely that during these periods, settlement in the survey area experienced considerable contraction. In fact it is theoretically possible that brief episodes of abandonment marked the ends of almost all settlement phases – though this could again stem from the low chronological resolution. Yet the frequent discontinuities observed in local pottery production between two subsequent periods and the lack of evidence of gradual horizontal displacements seem to indicate that the inhabitants of the survey area showed little respect for the landscape of the preceding periods, at least concerning the central settlement locus. To a certain degree, this supports the thesis that most periods of occupation were separated by brief intervals of radical transformation of the local societies or even complete abandonment of the basin.

Adopting a long-term perspective it is possible to observe four, possibly five asymmetric cycles of growth and decline of settlement in the survey area, at surprisingly equal intervals. The earliest and probably longest cycle covers the period of the Middle Neolithic and possibly, the Late Neolithic. Naturally it all depends on the chronology of the latter assemblage. But even if it truly dates to the Late Neolithic, it is possible that there was a longer period of abandonment before the Middle Neolithic site was re-occupied, especially bearing in mind the differences between the fabric groups of the two assemblages and their different distribution patterns. If this was the case, there were two separate cycles during the integral period of the Neolithic, bringing them closer to later cycles regarding longevity. The next cycle of growth and decline begins towards the end of the Late Bronze Age, culminating with the Late Iron Age unparalleled expansion and abruptly ending by the early Hellenistic Period, at the latest. It is interesting that within this long-term perspective an abandonment of the area by the early 5th century BC would be in a greater accord with the overall dynamic. The third or the fourth cycle begins sometime in

the Hellenistic Period and ends with the collapse of Late Roman authority on the Balkan Peninsula, towards the end of the 6th and the early decades of the 7th century AD. The last cycle covers the period between the 14th and mid-20th century, ending with the sudden decline and abandonment of the old village and the gradual emergence of a new, dispersed pattern over the past couple of decades. The coarse chronological framework prevents us from determining the exact duration of every cycle, but it is evident that the periods during which the local settlement retained the rank of a hamlet or small village didn't last longer than 5-6 centuries.

Although there is very little evidence, one can imagine that in most periods of the past, the local settlement was a part of a wider network of settlements of similar rank and size. This is hardly surprising knowing the geographic conditions in the region of the upper Mid-Vardar. It is unexpected episodes such as the sudden rise of Sopot during the Late Iron Age or the lack of evidence dating to the Eneolithic or the Early and Mid-Byzantine Period that call for similarly designed research in at least some of the surrounding micro-regions. The small communities, consisting of not more than a couple of dozen households were necessarily bound to maintain close relations with their neighbours. Thus although geography carved a separate niche for each of these communities, their survival depended on the normal functioning of a highly integrated social, economic and demographic network that surpassed micro-regional limits. To obtain a better understanding of the developments in one component of this network, it is necessary to have at least some idea about developments in the neighbouring components. By the same principle, the rugged region of the Taor Canyon shouldn't be seen in isolation. Settlement pattern and dynamics in this peripheral area must be sensitive to developments in the larger settlement centres in the basins of Skopje and Veles and on the Ovče Pole Plateau. Knowing more about the history of the nearest larger centres will doubtlessly shed more light on the developments in the "periphery" and vice-versa.